CHARLESTON BUDDHIST FELLOWSHIP

Buddhist Meditation And Depth Psychology



By
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Revised and Edited by
Allan R. Bomhard

Intermediate Series

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The doctrinal positions expressed in this manual are those of Theravādin Buddhism.

Contents

Introduction

"All mental phenomena have mind as their forerunner;[1] *they have mind as their chief; they are mind-made.*[2] *If one speaks or acts with evil intentions, suffering*[3] *will follow, just as the wheels of a cart follow the oxen that pull it along.*

"All mental phenomena have mind as their forerunner; they have mind as their chief; they are mind-made. If one speaks or acts with pure intentions, happiness will follow, like a shadow that never leaves one's side."

These words, which are the opening lines of the *Dhammapada*, were spoken by the *Buddha* 2600 years ago. They illustrate the central theme of Buddhist teaching, the human mind. Buddhism is probably the least understood of all major religions. Indeed, from a Western point of view, we might well question whether it warrants even to be called a "religion". In the West, we are accustomed to thinking of religion in terms of God, revelation, obedience, punishment, and redemption. The themes of creation, worship, judgment, and immortality have been major concerns in the Christian heritage and are virtually inseparable from the Western concept of religion. Hence, Westerners view Buddhism against such a cultural background and, in so doing, unconsciously project their own concepts, values, and expectations. Erroneously, they perceive ceremonies and bowing as examples of worship or even idolatry. They may extol Buddhism's scientific worldview or abhor and condemn its "atheism". The *Buddha* is sometimes vaguely equated with such concepts as "God" or "Savior", and meditation is wrongly suspected of being a hypnotic approach to mysticism or an escape from reality.

However, such mistaken notions of the *Dhamma*, the Teaching of the *Buddha*, are not entirely the result of Western ignorance and ethnocentrism. Before His demise, the *Buddha* predicted that, within a thousand years, His doctrine would fall into the hands of men of lesser understanding and would thereby become corrupted and distorted.[4] Such has been the case throughout much, if not most, of Asia. Ritual has replaced self-discipline, faith has replaced insight, and prayer has replaced understanding.

If the basis of Christianity is God, the basis of Buddhism is mind. From the Buddhist viewpoint, mind, or consciousness, is the core of our existence. Pleasure and pain, good and evil, time and space, life and death have no meaning to us apart from our awareness of them or thoughts about them. Whether God exists or does not exist, whether existence is primarily spiritual or primarily material, whether we live for a few decades or live forever — all these matters are, in the Buddhist view, secondary to the one empirical fact of which we do have

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[1] All mental phenomena have mind as their forerunner in the sense that mind is the most dominant and is the cause of the other three mental phenomena: (1) feeling (*vedanā*); (2) perception (*saññā*); and (3) predisposing mental formations or mental concomitants (*saṁkhārā*). These three have mind or consciousness (*viññāṇa*) as their precursor because, although they arise simultaneously with mind, they cannot arise if mind does not arise.

[2] "Mind as their chief", "mind-made" here means intention or volition (*cetanā*). In those who are deluded worldlings (*puthujjana*), volition leads to the performance of volitional actions, both good and evil. This volition and the resultant actions constitute *kamma* (Sanskrit *karma*), and *kamma* always follows one to produce results (*vipāka*). A more colloquial translation of the opening lines of the first two verses might be: "Mind is the starting point in shaping who we are — as we think, so we become."

[3] Physical or mental pain, misfortune, unsatisfactoriness, evil consequences, etc., and rebirth in lower planes of existence or in the lower strata of society if reborn in the human world.

[4] *Buddhism*, by Richard A. Gard (New York, NY: George Braziller, Inc. [1961]), pp. 207—208.

certainty: the existence of conscious experience as it proceeds through the course of daily living. Therefore, Buddhism focuses on the mind; for happiness and sorrow, pleasure and pain are psychological experiences. Even such notions as purpose, value, virtue, goodness, and worth have meaning only as the results of our attitudes and feelings.

Buddhism does not deny the reality of material existence, nor does it ignore the very great effect that the physical world has upon us. On the contrary, it refutes the mind-body dichotomy of the Brahmins and says that mind and body are interdependent. But since the fundamental reality of human existence is the ever-changing sequence of thoughts, feelings, emotions, and perceptions which comprise conscious experience, then, from the viewpoint of early Buddhism, the primary concern of religion must be these very experiences which make up our daily lives. Most significant of these are love and hate, fear and sorrow, pride and passion, struggle and defeat. Conversely, such concepts as vicarious atonement, Cosmic Consciousness, Ultimate Reality, *Buddha* Nature, and redemption of sins are metaphysical and hypothetical matters of secondary importance to the realities of daily existence.

Therefore, in Buddhism, the most significant fact of life is the first Noble Truth, the inevitable existence of *dukkha*. *Dukkha* is a Pāḷi word embracing all types of displeasurable experience — suffering, sorrow, fear, worry, pain, despair, discord, frustration, agitation, irritation, etc. The second Noble Truth states that the cause of *dukkha* is desire or craving (*taṇhā*). In various texts, this cause is further explained as being threefold — greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*). Again, on other occasions, the *Buddha* divided the cause of suffering into five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) — (1) desire for gratification of the senses; (2) anger; (3) sloth and torpor; (4) agitation and worry; and (5) skeptical doubt. On still other occasions, He listed ten causes of *dukkha* — (1) belief that oneself is an unchanging entity; (2) skepticism; (3) belief in liberation through rites, rules, and rituals; (4) sensual lust; (5) hatred; (6) craving for fine-material existence; (7) craving for immaterial existence; (8) conceit; (9) restlessness; and (10) ignorance. The Third Noble Truth states that *dukkha* can be overcome, and the Fourth Noble Truth prescribes the means by which this is achieved.

Thus, with the Fourth Noble Truth, Buddhism becomes a technique, a discipline, a way of life designed to free people from *dukkha* and improve the nature of human existence. This aspect of the *Dhamma* is called the Noble Eightfold Path, and includes moral teachings, self-discipline, development of wisdom and understanding, and improvement of one's environment on both a personal and social level. These have been dealt with in other writings and, for the sake of brevity, will not be repeated here. Suffice it to say that this essay is concerned with only one aspect of Buddhism, the practice of meditation. The ethical, practical, and logical facets of the Teaching are covered in other publications.

If the cause of suffering is primarily psychological, then, it must follow that the cure, also, is psychological. Therefore, we find in Buddhism a series of "mental exercises" or meditations designed to uncover and cure our psychological troubles.

Mistakenly, Buddhist meditation is frequently confused with yogic meditation, which often includes physical contortions, autohypnosis, quests for occult powers, and an attempted union with the divine. None of these are concerns or practices of the Noble Eightfold Path. In Buddhism, there are no drugs or stimulants, no secret teachings, and no mystical formulas. Buddhist meditation deals exclusively with the everyday phenomena of human consciousness. In the words of the Venerable Nyanaponika Thera (Siegmund Feniger, 1901—1994), a renowned Buddhist scholar and Monk:

> *In its spirit of self-reliance, satipaṭṭhāna does not require any elaborate technique or external devices. The daily life is its working material. It has nothing to do with any exotic cults or rites nor does it confer "initiations" or "esoteric knowledge" in any way other than by self-enlightenment.*
>
> *Using just the conditions of life it finds, satipaṭṭhāna does not require complete seclusion or monastic life, though in some who undertake the practice, the desire and need for these may grow.*[5]

Lest the reader suspect that some peculiarity of the "Western mind" precludes Westerners from the successful practice of meditation, we should note also the words of Rear Admiral E. H. Shattock, a British naval officer, who spent three weeks of diligent meditation practice in a Theravādin monastery near Rangoon:

> *Meditation, therefore, is a really practical occupation: it is in no sense necessarily a religious one, though it is usually thought of as such. It is itself basically academic, practical, and profitable. It is, I think, necessary to emphasize this point, because so many only associate meditation with holy or saintly people, and regard it as an advanced form of the pious life… This is not the tale of a conversion, but of an attempt to test the reaction of a well-tried Eastern system on a typical Western mind.*[6]

Reading about meditation is like reading about swimming; only by getting into the water does the aspiring swimmer begin to make progress. So it is with meditation and Buddhism in general. The *Dhamma* must be lived, not merely thought. Study and contemplation are valuable tools, but life itself is the training ground.

The following pages are an attempt to put into words what must be experienced within oneself. Or in the words of the *Dhammapada*: "*Buddhas* only point the way. Each one must work out his own salvation with diligence." Meditation is a personal experience, a subjective experience, and, consequently, each of us must tread his or her own path towards the summit of Enlightenment. Through words, we can instruct and encourage, but words are only symbols for reality.

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[5] *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, by Nyanaponika Thera (London: Rider & Co. [1962]), p. 82.
[6] *An Experiment in Mindfulness*, by E. H. Shattock (New York, NY: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc. [1960]), pp. 17, 19.

The Goals of Meditation

Before discussing the techniques of meditation, it is important that we first define its goals. That is, why does one meditate? What does one hope to accomplish?

The ultimate goals of meditation are the ultimate goals of Buddhism, that is, realization of *nibbāna* and the eradication of *dukkha*, or suffering. *Nibbāna*, however, is beyond the realm of conceptualization and all other forms of normal human experience. Therefore, we have no certainty that it exists until we ourselves have progressed to realizing it as a direct personal experience transcending logic and sense perception. *Nibbāna* can thus be defined as that which is experienced when one has achieved ultimate moral and psychological maturation. Little more can be said.

Therefore, the *Buddha* said relatively little about *nibbāna* and instead directed most of His Teaching towards two lesser goals, which are empirical realities of readily demonstrable worth. These were, first, the increase, enhancement, and cultivation of positive feelings such as love, compassion, equanimity, mental purity, and the happiness found in bringing happiness to others. Secondly, He advocated the relinquishment and renunciation of greed, hatred, delusion, conceit, agitation, and other negative, unwholesome states of mind.

As we gain in experience and self-understanding, and as we acquire full appreciation for the nature and quality of our own feelings, we find that the positive feelings (love, compassion, etc.) are satisfying, meaningful, and wholesome experiences in and of themselves. That is, they have their own inherent worth and intrinsic value independent of any worldview or religious dogma. Conversely, greed, hatred, lust, etc., are agitating, discomforting experiences (that is, *dukkha*), which, when present, preclude a full realization of the happiness born of love and equanimity. Thus, the realization of positive feelings and the relinquishment of negative feelings are the immediate goals and motivations of meditation. While *nibbāna* and an end of suffering are the primary goals of meditation and the realization of positive feelings is a secondary goal, there are also several tertiary goals which must be achieved before the higher ones can be fully realized — these are: (1) non-attachment; (2) insight; and (3) concentration.

1. *Non-attachment* (*virāga*) is freedom from craving (*taṇhā*) and freedom from infatuation for sensory experience (*kāmacchanda*), that is, from desire for gratification of the senses. Non-attachment is not a state of chronic apathy, nor is it a denial of sense perception existence. Rather, it is psychological liberation from our enslaving passions and our addictions to sensory and emotional pleasures. Thus, non-attachment is akin to freedom, equanimity, and serenity.

2. *Insight* (*vipassanā*) is a word with two meanings, both of which are sought in Buddhist meditation — they are: (1) the classical meaning and (2) the psychological meaning.

   In its classical usage, "insight" means full *awareness* of the three characteristics of existence, namely, impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and impersonality, or non-self (*anattā*). Otherwise stated, this means full realization of the fact that all things in the universe, all mental and physical phenomena without exception, are temporary and changing; the human psyche is also included and, thus, is not an immortal soul; and, as a consequence, suffering is always inevitable, for no state of mind, pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral can last forever. The word "awareness" is italicized here to distinguish it from mere conceptual

knowledge, which is usually insufficient to have a lasting effect upon one's feelings and values.

In its psychological usage, "insight" means gaining awareness of those feelings, motives, and values which have previously been unconscious. Repressed feelings of guilt, fear, lust, and hatred may lurk in the hidden recesses of our minds and unconsciously shape our lives until such time as they are brought into awareness. And unless they are brought into awareness, we cannot effectively deal with them. In Buddhism, this version of insight is included under the heading of "mindfulness" and will be discussed later.

3. *Concentration* (*samādhi*) involves the ability to keep one's attention firmly fixed on a given subject for protracted periods of time, thus overcoming the mind's usual discursive habit of flitting from subject to subject. As we shall see, concentration is one of the principal goals of Buddhist meditation.

Preparations

The initial endeavor in Buddhist meditation is to quiet the mind and enhance detachment and objectivity. For, only when the mind has stilled its perpetual ruminating and has momentarily abandoned its fascination with sensory experience can it readily become aware of the unconscious feelings and motivations that shape our thoughts, speech, and behavior. Furthermore, only with detached objectivity and its ensuing insights can we readily confront and renounce unwholesome feelings. On the other hand, we do not achieve complete calmness and detachment as long as we harbor unwholesome feelings and unconscious emotional conflicts. Thus, the process is reciprocal: the more we quiet the mind, the more we gain insight and relinquishment of undesirable feelings. The more we relinquish such feelings and resolve emotional conflicts, the more we quiet the mind and approach perfect calmness, detachment, and objectivity.

The obscuring of unconscious feelings by preoccupation with thoughts and actions is demonstrated in a variety of neurotic symptoms. Most characteristic are obsessive-compulsive reactions; these occur in persons who are desperately trying to repress overpowering impulses of fear, anger, lust, or guilt. In order to achieve this repression, they divert nearly all their attention to some repetitious mental or physical activity, which is conducted in a compulsive, ritualistic manner. If prevented from performing their defensive rituals, they often become acutely anxious and even panic as their unconscious feelings begin to come into awareness. Less severe examples of the same phenomena are seen in persons who are chronically anxious and are continuously focusing their worries on minor concerns of exaggerated importance such as unpaid bills, social commitments, and alleged physical ills. They, too, rarely relax and are forever busy with petty chores.

These neurotic symptoms are strikingly similar to an increasingly common way of life in Western society. Our ever-expanding populations with their accompanying advertising, mass entertainment, socializing, industrialization, and emphasis upon success, sensuality, possessions, popularity, and the like, have produced an environment in which we are forever bombarded with an increasing number of sensory and emotional stimuli. The opportunities for solitude and introspection have diminished to the point that now solitude is often viewed as either depressing or abnormal. This is not to assert that the majority of our citizens are involved in a frantic endeavor to escape from their inner selves. Such is no doubt the case with many, but there still remains a sizeable percentage of people who are involved in the same frenzy only because they have conformed to the social norm and have been lured into a habitual fascination for television, movies, iPods, video games, sporting events, and the countless other forms of readily-available entertainment. Such persons are not necessarily precluded from relative happiness and emotional well-being. The point to be made, however, is that the conditions of modern living are such as to pose several obstacles to successful meditation. These are threefold: psychological, material, and social. These same obstacles are present to a lesser degree in traditional Buddhist cultures and must be considered before discussing meditation itself.

Psychological Obstacles

It is virtually impossible for a busy person with manifold worldly obligations to suddenly and voluntarily quiet his or her mind to the point of removing all discursive thoughts. In a matter of minutes, if not seconds, meditators will find themselves either planning, reminiscing, or daydreaming. Therefore, before one begins meditation, some amount of moral development and self-discipline should be achieved. In the words of one of the *Buddha's* disciples:

> *"Those salutary rules of morality proclaimed by the Exalted One, for what purpose, brother Ānanda, has He proclaimed them?"*
>
> *"Well said, brother Bhadda, well said! Pleasing is your wisdom, pleasing your insight, excellent is your question! Those salutary rules of morality proclaimed by the Exalted One, were proclaimed by Him for the sake of cultivating the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (that is, meditation)."*[7]

In every Buddhist country, only a minority of devotees undertake the regular practice of meditation. The decision to meditate rests with each individual. Many wait until their later years, when moral development has progressed and family obligations have been fulfilled. On the other hand, meditation facilitates wisdom and morality and can be of benefit to the lay person as well as the Monk or Nun.

In addition to adjusting one's daily routine and cultivating morality and wisdom, it is often profitable to take a few minutes before each meditation to put one's mind in a receptive condition. This may be done by reflecting upon the goals and advantages of meditation or by reading or reciting some chosen passage of Buddhist literature or other appropriate writing. If drowsy, a brisk walk may freshen one's mind and can also allow one to think over and mentally dispense with matters which might otherwise be distracting. Also, if one has some necessary chores to perform which can be executed quickly and easily, doing these beforehand will reduce their interference with meditation.

[7] *Saṁyutta Nikāya*, 47:21.

Material Considerations

Much has been written in both ancient and modern literature about the physical and environmental factors conducive to successful meditation. Mostly, these are matters of common sense, which each person must determine for oneself on the basis of one's own individual needs and predispositions. In the *Visuddhimagga*, we read:

Food: Bland food suits one person, spicy food another.

Climate: A cool climate suits one, a warm climate another. So, when one finds that, by using a certain food or by living in a certain climate, one is comfortable, or one's unconcentrated mind becomes concentrated, or one's concentrated mind more so, then, that food or that climate is suitable. Any other food or climate is unsuitable.

Postures: Walking suits one; standing or sitting suits another. So, one should try them, as well as the place where one will meditate, for three days each, and the posture which should be chosen is the one in which one's unconcentrated mind becomes concentrated or one's concentrated mind more so. Any other posture should be understood as unsuitable.[8]

Seclusion and isolation from noise are important considerations, especially for beginners. In an urban environment, complete seclusion is rarely possible, but even relative seclusion is of value. How this is achieved must be determined by the practitioner's individual opportunities and circumstances. The time and duration of meditation will also vary with individual situations. Ideally, one should choose a time when one's mind is alert. Thirty to forty-five minutes is recommended for lay beginners, and many persons are of the opinion that it should be at the same time each day, preferably in the early morning. A good night's sleep and moderation in eating are valuable, but one should avoid an excess of fasting and sleep.

The preferred posture in both Asia and the West is the lotus posture or similar positions of sitting on the ground with legs folded. A cushion or other padding is desirable for comfort. These positions furnish maximum physical stability without the need of a backrest or other devices and are especially suitable if one intends to remain alert and motionless for protracted periods of time. However, many Westerners are unaccustomed to this posture and are thus unable to assume it or can do so only with discomfort. With practice, this difficulty is usually overcome; otherwise, one can meditate seated on a chair. The eyes either can be closed or resting on some neutral object such as a blank place on the ground or a simple geometric shape at a distance of three or four feet in front of one.

[8] *Visuddhimagga*, IV, 40—41. Translation by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (Colombo: R. Semage [1956]).

Social Factors

In Myanmar (Burma), meditation is discussed with interest and enthusiasm.[9] Men and women of all social levels and all professions, including high-ranking government officials, will take a leave of absence from their jobs to further their training, and a practitioner is often greeted with the words, "And how are you progressing in your meditation? Have you reached such and such a stage yet?"

The opposite is the case in America, where meditation is poorly understood; in fact, it is usually misunderstood. First of all, the relinquishment of worldly pursuits for the sake of spiritual and psychological gain is foreign to the prevailing values of both capitalist and socialist societies. Secondly, Americans often equate meditation with hypnotic trance, mysticism, or the occult. Consequently, the Western practitioner may conceal his practice to avoid social ridicule and religious antagonism. This problem is compounded by the existence of various quasi-religious and pseudo-scientific cults which often attract neurotics and social misfits with promises of psychic powers, lasting happiness, and physical health. Such organizations often claim "esoteric" meditations and speak favorably (though ignorantly) of Hinduism and Buddhism. Too often, Western impressions of Buddhism are gained either through these sources and their associated literature or through the unfavorable descriptions given by pro-Christian books, magazines, and newspapers.

[9] *An Experiment in Mindfulness*, p. 8.

Individual Variations

As we shall see, there are a variety of different meditation practices, each of which is intended for a specific individual need. In traditional Buddhist countries, novices often seek a learned Monk or meditation master and ask to be assigned a specific meditation subject.[10] In the West, this is virtually impossible. Competent meditation masters are few and far between, and those masters who do visit our shores find that linguistic and cultural barriers prevent them from adequately appraising a newcomer's needs. Thus, the Western Buddhist must fend for himself or herself, relying on his or her own judgment and proceeding sometimes by trial and error. Here, again, we should note the words of the *Visuddhimagga*:

> *For, when a very skillful archer, who is working to split a hair, actually splits the hair on one occasion, he discerns the modes of the position of his feet, the bow, the bowstring, and the arrow thus: "I split the hair as I stood thus, with the bow thus, the bowstring thus, the arrow thus." From then on, he recaptures those same modes and repeats the splitting of the hair without fail. So too, the meditator must discern such modes as that of suitable food, etc., thus: "I attained this after eating this food, attending on such a person, in such a lodging, in this posture, at this time." In this way, when that [absorption] is lost, he will be able to recapture those modes and renew the absorption, or while familiarizing himself with it, he will be able to repeat that absorption again and again.*[11]

Not only do meditation requirements differ from person to person, they also differ for the same person at different times. In the words of the *Buddha*:

> *"Monks, suppose a man wanted to make a small fire burn up, and he put wet grass on it, put wet cow dung on it, put wet sticks on it, sprinkled it with water, and scattered dust on it, would that man be able to make the small fire burn up?"*
>
> *"No, Venerable Sir."*
>
> *"So too, Monks, when the mind is slack, that is not the time to develop the tranquility enlightenment factor, the concentration enlightenment factor, and the equanimity enlightenment factor. Why is that? Because a slack mind cannot be well roused by those states. When the mind is slack, that is the time to develop the investigation-of-states enlightenment factor, the energy enlightenment factor, and the happiness enlightenment factor. Why is that? Because a slack mind can well be roused by those states.*
>
> *"Monks, suppose a man wanted to extinguish a great mass of fire, and he put dry grass on it… and did not scatter dust on it, would that man be able to extinguish that great mass of fire?"*
>
> *"No, venerable sir."*
>
> *"So too, Monks, when the mind is agitated, that is not the time to develop the investigation-of-states enlightenment factor, the energy enlightenment factor, or the happiness enlightenment factor. Why is that? Because an agitated mind cannot well be*

[10] *Visuddhimagga*, III, 62—65, 121.
[11] *Visuddhimagga*, IV, 120.

> *quieted by those states. When the mind is agitated, that is the time to develop the tranquility enlightenment factor, the concentration enlightenment factor, and the equanimity enlightenment factor. Why is that? Because an agitated mind can well be quieted by those states."*[12]

There is no prescribed duration for the amount of time one should spend in meditation. The popular Western notion of Buddhist Monks spending a lifetime with nearly every available moment dedicated to meditative seclusion is not supported by the recorded Teachings of the *Buddha* or the accounts of the daily activities of the *Buddha* and his followers. Nor is this the case with Theravādin Monks today, except during temporary periods of intensive training. As with all other aspects of meditation, the amount of time must be varied according to individual needs and circumstances.

One final point must be made before proceeding to the techniques of meditation. It is simply this: Meditation requires patience, persistence, and effort. For one who practices less than several hours a day, lasting and notable progress can only be achieved by months, if not years, of endeavor. There are no shortcuts or magical formulas. Consequently, the aspiring practitioner should not expect quick results and, before starting, should decide if he or she sincerely intends to put forth the necessary time and effort. A decision not to meditate, however, in no way precludes one from progressing towards the same goals of insight, non-attachment, concentration, etc. Their full realization requires formal meditation practice, but relative success may be acquired at a slower pace through cultivation of one's moral and intellectual faculties.[13]

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[12] *Saṁyutta Nikāya*, 46:53.

[13] *Buddhism as a Way of Life*, by Douglas M. Burns (San Carlos, CA: Neo-Dhamma [1964]).

The Techniques of Meditation

The seventh step of the Noble Eightfold Path is termed "Right Mindfulness", also called the "Four Foundations of Mindfulness", or "*satipaṭṭhāna*". These three terms are synonymous and encompass not only the most important aspects of Theravādin Buddhist meditation but also one of the most unique and important features of all Schools of Buddhism. A full explanation of mindfulness, or *satipaṭṭhāna*, is given in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, which appears twice in the Pāḷi Canon. The *Buddha* begins the discourse as follows:

> *"This is the only way, Monks, for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, for the destruction of suffering and grief, for reaching the right path, for the attainment of nibbāna, namely, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness."*[14]

This same message he repeated frequently:

> *"Those for whom you have sympathy, O Monks, those who deem it fit to listen to you — friends and companions, kinsmen and relatives — they should be encouraged, introduced to, and established in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness."*[15]

And again:

> *"There are three taints (āsava, or cankers), O Monks: the taint of sensuality, the taint of desire for renewed existence, and the taint of ignorance. For eliminating these three taints, O Monks, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness should be cultivated."*[16]

This same emphasis has persisted even to the present day in some sections of the Buddhist world, as described by the Venerable Nyanasatta Thera:

> *The great importance of the Discourse on Mindfulness (that is, the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta) has never been lost to the Buddhists of the Theravada tradition. In Ceylon, even when the knowledge and practice of the Dhamma was at its lowest ebb through centuries of foreign domination, the Sinhala Buddhists never forgot the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. Memorizing the Sutta has been an unfailing practice among the Buddhists, and even today in Ceylon there are large numbers who can recite the Sutta from memory. It is a common sight to see on full-moon days devotees who are observing the eight precepts, engaged in community recital of the Sutta. Buddhists are intent on hearing this Discourse even in the last moments of their lives; and at the bed-side of a dying Buddhist either Monks or laymen recite this venerated text.*[17]

Thus, it seems paradoxical that most Western texts on Buddhism merely list Right Mindfulness as one of the steps of the Eightfold Path and say little more except to redefine it by

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[14] *The Foundations of Mindfulness*. Translation by Nyanasatta Thera. Buddhist Publication Society, Wheel no. 19.
[15] *Saṁyutta Nikāya*, 47:48.
[16] *Saṁyutta Nikāya*, 47:50.
[17] *The Foundations of Mindfulness*, p. 3.

such terms as "right contemplation" and "right reflection". The reason is probably twofold. First, *satipaṭṭhāna* cannot be as concisely explained as the other seven steps; for it is not a single step but includes instead several distinct meditation exercises. Second, to be properly understood, the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta must be examined from a psychological point of view. Most scholars of comparative religion are accustomed to approaching their studies from religious, ethical, or philosophical frames of reference, but none of these perspectives apply here. If this *sutta* alone was to be filed on the shelves of a public library, it would most aptly be placed adjacent to the archives of eclectic psychiatry and would have little in common with the classic writings of religion and philosophy. Even psychology would not be an appropriate title, for the *sutta* is not concerned with any theoretical or conceptual interpretation of the mind. It deals only with the empirical facts of conscious experience and prescribes the techniques for mental development. It is, therefore, not surprising that many Westerners who have scanned the pages of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta have judged it confusing, meaningless, and sometimes morbid.

In addition to the two occurrences of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta mentioned above, condensed versions of the same teaching appear several times in the *Sutta Piṭaka*.

The four parts of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness are: (1) contemplation of the body (*kāyānupassanā*); (2) contemplation of feelings (*vedanānupassanā*); (3) contemplation of state of the mind (*cittānupassanā*); and (4) contemplation of mental objects, or the contents of the mind (*dhammānupassanā*). The body contemplation is itself divided into six parts — breathing, postures, clear comprehension of action, repulsiveness, material elements, and the cemetery contemplations.

Mindfulness of Breathing

The initial endeavor in Buddhist meditation is to calm and quiet the mind so that it is fully alert but has temporarily diminished the quantity of daydreaming, planning, reminiscing, and all other forms of verbal and visual thinking. This goal can only be approached gradually, and, therefore, the beginner should start his practice by focusing his attention on some quiet, readily available, rhythmic process. Respiratory movements are ideal for this purpose. Thus the first exercise of the *sutta* begins:

> *"Herein, Monks, a Monk, having gone to the forest, to the foot of a tree, or to an empty place, sits down cross-legged, keeps his body erect and his mindfulness alert. Mindfully, he breathes in, and, mindfully, he breathes out. Breathing in a long breath, he knows 'I breathe in a long breath'; breathing out a long breath, he knows 'I breathe out a long breath'; breathing in a short breath, he knows 'I breathe in a short breath'; breathing out a short breath, he knows 'I breathe out a short breath.' 'Conscious of the whole [breath-]body, I shall breathe in,' thus, he trains himself. 'Conscious of the whole [breath-]body, I shall breathe out,' thus, he trains himself. 'Calming the bodily function [of breathing], I shall breathe in,' thus, he trains himself. 'Calming the bodily function [of breathing], I shall breathe out,' thus, he trains himself. As a skillful turner or his apprentice, making a long turn, knows 'I am making a long turn,' or making a short turn, knows 'I am making a short turn,' just so, the Monk, breathing in a long breath, knows 'I breathe in a long breath'; breathing out a long breath, he knows 'I breathe out a long breath.'…"*

The practitioner endeavors to keep his mind focused only on the act of breathing itself and not to think about breathing as a subject of intellectual contemplation. In other words, one attempts to give full attention to the reality of immediate experience and not become involved in speculations or contemplations *about* reality.

The theory is quite simple, but the practice most difficult. In a typical case, at the beginning of their meditation, beginners directs their attention solely to the process of breathing. Then, after a few seconds, they inadvertently begin to think, "So far, I am doing all right. My mind hasn't strayed from its subject." But at this very moment, they have strayed from their subject. For now, they are not concentrating, but thinking about concentrating. If they do not catch themselves (and they probably will not), the stream of consciousness will proceed something as follows: "My mind hasn't strayed from its subject. I'm doing better than yesterday. I wonder why? Maybe it's because I've finished all of my letter writing. I wonder if Michael will answer the letter I sent him? He hasn't… Oh, Oh! I've gotten off the subject. I'd better get back to it. But I'm not really back; I'm just thinking about it. I wonder how long it will take me…" And so on it goes, day after day, week after week, until the practitioners begin to wonder whether they are not seeking to accomplish the impossible. Yet, the fact remains that many thousands living today have achieved a high degree of concentration.

With nothing less than utter amazement, the Western novice reads Nyanaponika Thera's remarks concerning Burmese *satipaṭṭhāna* training:

Three to four hours of continuous mindfulness, that is, without unnoticed breaks, are regarded as the minimum for a beginner undergoing a course of strict practice.[18]

The most widely practiced form of the breathing meditation (*ānāpānasati*) is focusing attention at the tip of the nose, where one feels the faint pressure of the ebb and flow of the breath. This technique is not mentioned in any of the recorded teachings of the *Buddha* or his disciples but has been popular at least since the time of Buddhaghosa in the fifth century CE. In the words of Buddhaghosa:

This is the simile of the gate-keeper: just as a gate-keeper does not examine people inside and outside the town, asking "Who are you? Where have you come from? Where are you going? What have you got in your hand?" — for those people are not his concern —, but does examine each man as he arrives at the gate, so too, the incoming breaths that have gone inside and the outgoing breaths that have gone outside are not this Monk's concern, but they are his concern each time they arrive at the [nostril] gate itself.[19]

And again, in the simile of the saw, the woodcutter's attention is focused only at the point of contact between the saw and the wood:

As the saw's teeth, so the in-breaths and out-breaths. As the man's mindfulness, established by the saw's teeth where they touch the tree trunk, without his giving attention to the saw's teeth as they approach and recede, though they are not unknown to him as they do so, and so he manifests effort, carries out a task and achieves an effect, so too, the Bhikkhu sits, having established mindfulness at the tip of the nose or on the upper lip, without giving attention to the in-breaths and out-breaths as they approach and recede, though they are not unknown to him as they do so, and he manifests effort, carries out a task and achieves an effect.[20]

Modifications of the breathing meditation can be applied to suit individual requirements. In the early stages of practice, many persons find that mentally counting the breaths enhances concentration. In these instances, one is advised not to count less than five or more than ten. Upon reaching ten, the counting starts over. By going beyond ten, the counting, rather than the breathing, is likely to become the subject of one's attention:

Herein, this clansman who is a beginner should first give attention to this meditation subject by counting. And when counting, he should not stop short of five or go beyond ten or make any break in the series. By stopping short of five, his thoughts get excited in the cramped space, like a herd of cattle shut in a cramped pen. By going beyond ten, his thoughts take the number [rather than the breaths] for their support.[21]

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[18] *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, p. 98.
[19] *Visuddhimagga*, VIII, 200.
[20] *Visuddhimagga*, VIII, 202.
[21] *Visuddhimagga*, VIII, 190.

But how long is one to go on counting? Until, without counting, mindfulness remains settled on the in-breaths and out-breaths as its object. For, counting is simply a device for settling mindfulness on the in-breaths and out-breaths as object by cutting off the external dissipation of applied thoughts.[22]

In the initial stages of practice, one merely observes the process of breathing without attempting to change its rate or depth. Later, as concentration is achieved, the breathing is gradually and deliberately slowed in order to further quiet the mind. There is, however, no attempt to stop respiration as in certain yogic practices:

> *When his gross in-breaths and out-breaths have ceased, his consciousness occurs with the sign of the subtle in-breaths and out-breaths as its object. And when that has ceased, it goes on occurring with the successively subtler signs as its object. How? Suppose a man struck a bronze bell with a big iron bar and at once a loud sound arose, his consciousness would occur with the gross sound as its object; then, when the gross sound had ceased, it would occur afterwards with the sign of the subtle sound as its object; and when that had ceased, it would go on occurring with the sign of the successively subtler sound as its object.*[23]

It was a Burmese meditation teacher, Venerable U Nārada (Mingun Sayādaw), who, in the early part of the last century, stressed the application of mindfulness of breathing as a means of cultivating direct awareness. It was he who gave the first strong impetus to the revival of *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation in contemporary Myanmar (Burma). He passed away in 1955 at the age of 87 and is said by many to have realized *nibbāna*.

A variation of the breathing meditation was developed by another Burmese Monk, the Venerable Mahāsi Sayādaw, who was a pupil of the Venerable U Nārada. His technique involves focusing attention upon the respiratory movements of the abdomen instead of the sensation at the tip of the nose. This system has become popular in several parts of southern Asia. A revived interest in meditation has developed in that section of the world, especially in Myanmar, where numerous training centers have been established, and thousands of Monks and lay people have received instruction.[24]

During meditation, when practitioners find that their mind has strayed from its subject, there should be no attempt to suppress or forcibly remove the extraneous thoughts. Rather, they should briefly take mental note of them and objectively label them with some appropriate term. This may be done by thinking to oneself "planning", "remembering", "imagining", etc., as the case may be. Then, they should return to their original meditation subject. However, if after several tries, the unwanted thoughts persist, they should temporarily take the thoughts themselves as the meditation subject. In so doing, their intensity will diminish, and they can then return to their original subject. This same technique can be used for distracting noises. It can also be used for feelings of anger or frustration, which may develop as the result of unwanted thoughts or distractions. In these instances, meditators should think to themselves "noise", or "irritation".[25]

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[22] *Visuddhimagga*, VIII, 195.
[23] *Visuddhimagga*, VIII, 206—207.
[24] *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, pp. 85—86.
[25] *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, p. 97.

As the mind becomes quiet and verbal thinking begins to diminish, other stimuli come into awareness. Among these are sensations, such as itches and minor pains, which are always present but go unnoticed because attention is directed elsewhere. The same may occur with emotions such as worry or fear, and these we shall discuss in detail later. Pictures or visual scenes may arise and are often so vivid as to be termed visions or hallucinations. They often have the appearance of dreams or distant memories and differ from thoughts in that meditators usually find themselves a passive spectator not knowing when such scenes will arise or what forms they will take. Meditators should first attempt to ignore these sensations, feelings, and pictures. This failing, they should label them "itching", "fear", "picture", etc., and, lastly, make them their meditation subject until they diminish.[26]

To be successful, meditation should not be an unpleasant experience. Strain and tension should be minimized. Therefore, if practitioners find themselves becoming tense, irritable, or fatigued during meditation, they may wish to terminate the practice until they acquire a better state of mind.

[26] *An Experiment in Mindfulness*, pp. 52—55.

Mindfulness of Postures and of Actions

Following mindfulness of breathing, the next exercise prescribed in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta is the development of the same clear awareness towards one's daily actions. Thus, the *Buddha* continues:

> *"And further, Monks, a Monk knows when he is going 'I am going'; he knows when he is standing 'I am standing'; he knows when he is sitting 'I am sitting'; he knows when he is lying down 'I am lying down'; or however his body is disposed, so he knows it. And further, Monks, a Monk, in going forward and back, applies clear comprehension; in looking straight on and looking away, he applies clear comprehension; in bending and in stretching, he applies clear comprehension; in wearing robes and carrying the bowl, he applies clear comprehension; in eating, drinking, chewing, and savoring, he applies clear comprehension; in attending to the calls of nature, he applies clear comprehension; in walking, in standing, in sitting, in falling asleep, in waking up, in speaking, and in keeping silence, he applies clear comprehension."*

Here, we note a similarity between early Buddhism and Zen. Or as the Zen master would say:

> *In walking, just walk. In sitting, just sit. Above all, don't wobble.*

Usually, while dressing, eating, working, etc., we act out of habit and give little attention to our physical actions. Our minds are preoccupied with a variety of other concerns. In *satipaṭṭhāna*, however, practitioners devote themselves entirely to the situation at hand. Persons interested in meditation are often heard to complain, "But I don't have time to meditate." However, the form of mindfulness we are now discussing can be practiced at all times and in all situations, regardless of one's occupation or social and religious commitments.

As with breathing meditation, the primary intent of this discipline is to prepare one's mind for advanced stages of psychological development. However, a valuable by-product is that it can greatly increase one's proficiency at physical skills. In Japan, Zen practitioners have utilized it to achieve mastery in swordsmanship, archery, and martial arts. The *Buddha* Himself is quoted as saying:

> *"Mindfulness, I declare, O Monks, is helpful everywhere."*[27]

And again:

> *"Whosoever, Monks, has cultivated and regularly practiced mindfulness of the body, to whatever state realizable by direct knowledge he may bend his mind for reaching it by direct knowledge, he will then acquire proficiency in that very field."*[28]

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[27] *Saṁyutta Nikāya*, 46:53.
[28] *Majjhima Nikāya*, 119.

For those engaged in strict monastic training, mindfulness of actions becomes a more formalized practice. Breathing and walking meditations often are alternated for periods of about thirty minutes each. In walking, the Monks or Nuns pace slowly along a level stretch of ground and direct their attention fully to the movement of each foot, thinking: "lift", "forward", "down" — "lift", "forward", "down". This alternation of breathing and walking practice may last sixteen hours each day for a period of six or more weeks.

Repulsiveness, Material Components, And Cemetery Contemplations

The last of the body meditations are designed to overcome one's narcissistic infatuation for one's own body, to abandon unrealistic desires for immortality, and to destroy sensual lust. To achieve these ends, two principles are employed. First, one vividly and repeatedly impresses upon one's mind the temporary, changing, and compounded nature of the body. Second, one establishes and persistently reinforces a series of negative associations to the usually sensual features of the body. This latter process employs the same principles as behavior therapy and Pavlovian conditioning. However, *satipaṭṭhāna* differs from Pavlovian and behavior therapy in that the conditioning is established by the meditator himself instead of an external agent.

Thus, the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta continues:

> *"And further, Monks, a Monk reflects on this very body enveloped by the skin and full of manifold impurities, from the soles up, and from the top of the head hair down, thinking thus: 'There are in this body hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, kidney, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, gorge, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, saliva, nasal mucus, synovial fluid, urine.'*
>
> *"Just as if there were a double-mouthed provision bag full of various kinds of grain such as hill paddy, paddy, green gram, cow-peas, sesame seeds, and husked rice, and a man with sound eyes, having opened that bag, were to take stock of the contents thus: 'This is hill paddy, this is paddy, this is green gram, this is cow-peas, this is sesame seeds, this is husked rice.' Just so, Monks, a Monk reflects on this very body, enveloped by the skin and full of manifold impurities, from the soles up, and from the top of the head hair down, thinking thus: 'There are in this body hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, kidney, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, intestines, mesentery, gorge, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, saliva, nasal mucus, synovial fluid, urine.'*
>
> *"And further, Monks, a Monk reflects on this very body however it be placed or disposed, by way of the material elements: 'There are in this body the element of earth, the element of water, the element of fire (caloricity), the element of air.'*
>
> *"Just as if, Monks, a clever cow-butcher or his apprentice, having slaughtered a cow and divided it into portions, should be sitting at the junction of four high roads, in the same way, a Monk reflects on this very body, as it is placed or disposed, by way of the material elements: 'There are in this body the elements of earth, water, fire, and air'."*

This last paragraph is explained in the *Visuddhimagga*:

> *Just as the butcher, while feeding the cow, bringing it to the shambles, keeping it tied up after bringing it there, slaughtering it, and seeing it slaughtered and dead, does not lose the perception "cow" so long as he has not carved it up and divided it into parts; but when he has divided it up and is sitting there, he loses the perception "cow" and the perception "meat" occurs; he does not think "I am selling cow" or "They are carrying cow away", but rather he thinks "I am selling meat" or "They are carrying meat away";*

so, too, this Monk, while still a foolish ordinary person — both formerly as a lay person and as one gone forth into homelessness —, does not lose the perception "living being" or "man" or "person" so long as he does not, by resolution of the compact into elements, review this body, however placed, however disposed, as consisting of elements. But when he does review it as consisting of elements, he loses the perception "living being" and his mind establishes itself upon elements.[29]

The last of the body meditations are the cemetery contemplations. Numbers 1, 2, 5, and 9, respectively, are quoted here. The remaining contemplations are similar and deal with intermediate stages of decomposition:

"And further, Monks, as if a Monk sees a body dead, one, two, or three days, swollen, blue and festering, thrown in the charnel ground, he then applies this perception to his own body, thus: 'Verily, also my own body is of the same nature; such it will become and will not escape it'."

"And further, Monks, as if a Monk sees a body thrown in the charnel ground, being eaten by crows, hawks, vultures, dogs, jackals, or by different kinds of worms, he then applies this perception to his own body, thus: 'Verily, also my own body is of the same nature; such it will become and will not escape it'."

"And further, Monks, as if a Monk sees a body thrown in the charnel ground and reduced to a skeleton without flesh and blood, held together by the tendons… And further, Monks, as if a Monk sees a body thrown in the charnel ground and reduced to bones, gone rotten and become dust, he then applies this perception to his own body, thus: 'Verily, also my own body is of the same nature; such it will become and will not escape it'."

Similar meditations on the digestion and decomposition of food are listed in other sections of the Pāḷi scriptures for the purpose of freeing the practitioner from undue cravings for food:

"When a Monk devotes himself to this perception of repulsiveness in nutriment, his mind retreats, retracts, and recoils from craving for flavors. He nourishes himself with nutriment without vanity…"[30]

Though these meditations are intended to eliminate passion and craving, they carry the risk of making one morbid and depressed. Therefore, the Buddha recommended:

"If, in the contemplation of the body, bodily agitation, or mental lassitude or distraction should arise in the meditator, then, he should turn his mind to a gladdening subject. Having done so, joy will arise in him."[31]

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[29] *Visuddhimagga*, XI, 30.
[30] *Visuddhimagga*, XI, 26.
[31] *Saṁyutta Nikāya*, 47:10.

A cartoon in an American medical magazine shows four senior medical students standing together. Three are engaged in active conversation. Only the remaining one turns his head to take notice of a pretty nurse. The caption beneath the cartoon reads: "Guess which one has *not* done twelve pelvic examinations today." It is doubtful that many persons outside of the medical profession will appreciate the meaning, but to medical students and interns, it speaks a reality. During his months of training in obstetrics and gynecology, the medical trainee must spend many hours engaged in examining and handling the most repulsive aspects of female genitals. As a result, he finds the female body becoming less attractive and his sexual urges diminishing. During my own years as a medical student and intern, this observation was repeatedly confirmed by the comments of my co-workers, both married and single. As we have seen, the same principle is utilized in the sections of the Discourse on Repulsiveness and the cemetery contemplations.

Other aspects of scientific and medical training can produce results similar to those sought in the latter three body meditations. Chemistry, biochemistry, and histology foster an objective way of viewing the body which is virtually identical to the contemplation of elements. Anatomy, of course, is similar to the contemplation of repulsiveness. And in hospital training, the persistent encounter with old age, debilitation, and death continuously reinforces the words of the cemetery contemplations: "Verily, also my own body is of the same nature; such it will become and will not escape it." Similarly, in order to acquire a vivid mental image of the cemetery contemplations, Buddhist Monks occasionally visit graveyards to behold corpses in various stages of decay.[32] However, such experiences bear fruit only if one takes advantage of them and avoids the temptation to ignore and forget.

[32] *Visuddhimagga*, VI.

Discursive Meditations

Successful application of the *satipaṭṭhāna* meditations requires developed concentration, which, in turn, necessitates many hours of practice. There are, however, a variety of discursive meditations and related practices which the lay devotee can utilize to notable advantage. Some of these are not meditations in the strict sense of the word and are commonplace in virtually all religions.

A hymn, a poem, a passage from the *Dhamma*, or a passage from any inspiring literature can temporarily elevate the mind and serve to cultivate wholesome feelings. Many Buddhists make a habit of setting aside a few minutes each day to reflect upon the Teaching or to either read or recite from memory some favored passage of the *Dhammapada*. For some, similar benefits may be gained from an evening stroll, a period of solitude in a forest or a desert, or a pause for contemplative relaxation in the midst of a hurried day.[33] These latter three serve the added advantage of allowing one to reflect upon one's values and reappraise oneself.

Perhaps the most popular discursive meditation practiced by Theravādin Buddhists is the meditation on loving-kindness (*mettā*). It is often recited in the morning in order to create a wholesome mood for the rest of the day. There are several versions, one of which is as follows:

> My mind is temporarily pure, free from all impurities; free from lust, hatred, and delusion; free from all evil thoughts.
>
> My mind is pure and clean. My stainless mind is like a polished mirror.
>
> As a clean and empty vessel is filled with pure water, I now fill my clean heart and pure mind with peaceful and sublime thoughts of boundless loving-kindness, overflowing compassion, sympathetic joy, and perfect equanimity.
>
> I have now cleansed my mind and heart of anger, ill will, cruelty, violence, jealousy, envy, passion, and aversion.
>
> May I be well and happy!
>
> May I be free from suffering, disease, grief, worry, and anger!
>
> May I be strong, self-confident, healthy, and peaceful!
>
> Now I charge every particle of my being, from head to foot, with thoughts of boundless loving-kindness and compassion. I am the embodiment of loving-kindness and compassion. My whole body is saturated with loving-kindness and compassion. I am a stronghold, a fortress of loving-kindness and compassion.
>
> What I have gained I now give unto others.

Think of all your near and dear ones at home, individually or collectively. Fill them with thoughts of loving-kindness, and wish them peace and happiness, repeating, "May all beings be well and happy!" Then, think of all seen and unseen beings, living near and far, men, women, animals, and all living beings, in the East, West, North, South, above and below, and radiate boundless loving-kindness, without any enmity or obstruction, towards all, irrespective of social status, gender, race, age, ethnicity, nationality, religion or creed, sexual orientation, etc.

Think that all living beings are your brothers and sisters, fellow travelers in the ocean of life. Identify yourself with all. Be one with all.

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[33] *Visuddhimagga*, IX.

Repeat ten times — *May all be well and happy —,* and wish them all peace and happiness.[34] Another useful meditation for lay practitioners is as follows:

May I be generous and helpful!
May I be well-disciplined and refined in manners!
May I be pure and clean in all my dealings!
May my thoughts, words, and deeds be pure!
May I not be selfish and self-possessive but selfless and disinterested!
May I be able to sacrifice my pleasures for the sake of others!
May I be wise and be able to see things as they truly are!
May I see the light of Truth and lead others from darkness to light!
May I be enlightened and be able to enlighten others!
May I be able to give the benefit of my knowledge to others!
May I be energetic, vigorous, and persevering!
May I strive diligently until I achieve my goal!
May I be fearless in facing dangers and courageously surmount all obstacles!
May I be able to serve others to the best of my ability!
May I be ever patient!
May I be able to bear and forbear the wrongs of others!
May I ever be tolerant and see the good and beautiful in all!
May I ever be truthful and honest!
May I ever be kind, friendly, and compassionate!
May I be able to regard all as my brothers and sisters and be one with all!
May I ever be calm, serene, unruffled, and peaceful!
May I gain a balanced mind!
May I have perfect equanimity![35]

In the mind of a devout Buddhist, the *Buddha* symbolizes the embodiment of one's highest spiritual ideals. Consequently, the *Buddha* is often taken as a meditation subject. As long as the meditator recollects the special qualities of the *Buddha* in this way, "For this and this reason, the Blessed One is accomplished,… for this and this reason He is blessed", then, on that occasion, his mind is not obsessed by greed, or obsessed by hate, or obsessed by delusion; his mind has rectitude on that occasion, being inspired by the Perfect One.[36]

When a noble disciple contemplates upon the Enlightened One, at that time, his mind is not enwrapped by lust nor by hatred nor by delusion, and, at that time, his mind is rightly directed towards the *Tathāgata*. And with a rightly directed mind, the noble disciple gains enthusiasm for the goal, enthusiasm for the *Dhamma*, gains the delight derived from the *Dhamma*. In him thus delighted, joy arises; to one joyfully minded, body and mind become calm; calmed in body and mind, one feels at ease; and if at ease, the mind finds concentration.[37]

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[34] *Buddhism in a Nutshell*, by Nārada Thera (Bambalapitiya, Ceylon: Asoka Dharmadutha Saṅgamāya [1959]), pp. 67—69.
[35] *Buddhism in a Nutshell*, by Nārada Thera (Bambalapitiya, Ceylon: Asoka Dharmadutha Saṅgamāya [1959]), pp. 70—71.
[36] *Visuddhimagga*, VII, 65.
[37] *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, VI, 10.

The hazard in meditating on the *Buddha*, however, is that the unsophisticated meditator may not be aware of the psychological reasons for this exercise. In such a case, the practice is likely to become a devotional one similar to those of non-Buddhist religions.

Mindfulness of Feelings, State of the Mind, And Mental Objects

Some time ago, I became acquainted with a Western Buddhist who, for several years, had made a daily practice of meditating on loving-kindness (*mettā*). He confided that he had chosen this meditation subject because he was prone to frequent outbreaks of anger and chronic resentment; a "hate problem", he termed it. But despite years of meditation, the hatred had not diminished; the meditation had failed. Why? As our acquaintance broadened, the answer became apparent. My friend had several poorly-concealed intellectual and emotional deficiencies. He never once revealed that he acknowledged these; on the contrary, he displayed frequent attempts to bolster his self-image. Such attempts were invariably doomed to frustration, especially when his accomplishments and social poise were contrasted with those of others. By reacting with anger towards others, he avoided the unpleasantness of looking at himself. In other words, his anger was a psychological defense through which he sought to maintain an illusion of self-esteem. Thus, unconsciously, he did not wish to relinquish his anger. To do so would be too painful, and to attack the anger by meditating on loving-kindness was futile, for anger was only a symptom. The real problem lay much deeper.

To cure such hatred requires three things. First, one must become aware of the existence of one's inadequacies and their accompanying humiliations; in other words, what is unconscious must become conscious. Second, one must totally confront such unpleasant feelings and acknowledge them in their entirety. And finally, one must relinquish the egotistical desire for self-exaltation. This last requirement is best achieved by objectively analyzing the illusion of self and gaining full appreciation for the changing and compounded nature of the personality. In other words, one must acquire insight of both types discussed above under the goals of meditation. How can this be achieved?

Awareness of unconscious feelings is rarely obtained through logical deductions or rational explanations. A person who harbors these feelings will either refuse to believe what he is told or will come to accept it only as so much factual information devoid of emotional significance. An excellent illustration is the case of a forty-year-old woman who sought psychiatric help for severe feelings of fear, guilt, and depression. On examining her case, it became apparent that her problem was largely due to repressed feelings of hatred for her mother, a very domineering and selfish woman. After much discussion, the patient finally deduced that she indeed did hate her mother, and for the next two months, she spoke knowingly and learnedly about her repressed hatred and resultant symptoms. Yet, she improved not one bit. Then one day, she entered the office shaking with rage and cried, "God, I hate that witch!" There was never a more vivid example of the difference between knowing and experiencing. Improvement quickly followed.

This example is typical of many psychiatric case histories. One sees patients who speak in the most erudite manner about Freud and Jung and adeptly employ psychiatric terminology. Yet, this intellectual verbiage is often a subtle defense against facing their true feelings. Conversely, many unsophisticated and unlearned patients are quick to achieve insight and make rapid progress. Consequently, the skillful psychiatrist makes limited use of technical jargon and theoretical concepts. He or she asks questions often but answers few. This same technique is

employed in Burmese and Zen meditation centers. The student is discouraged from making philosophical inquiries and is told: "Pursue your meditation, and soon you will see."[38]

> *"You may, Ānanda, also keep in mind this marvelous and wonderful quality of the Tathāgata (the Buddha): knowingly arise feelings in the Tathāgata, knowingly they continue, knowingly they cease; knowingly arise perceptions in the Tathāgata, knowingly they continue, knowingly they cease; knowingly arise mental formations in the Tathāgata, knowingly they continue, knowingly they cease. This, Ānanda, you may also keep in mind as a marvelous and wonderful quality of the Tathāgata."*[39]

In his earlier years, Sigmund Freud experimented with hypnosis. He found it a useful tool in revealing unconscious feelings and conflicts to the *therapist,* but it was of little value to the patient. The reason was that hypnotic trance precluded the patient from consciously confronting and resolving his problems. Therefore, Freud abandoned hypnosis in preference to the now standard procedures of psychiatry and psychoanalysis. These same findings and conclusions have often been repeated by later researchers and clinicians. Similarly, the *Buddha* rejected the use of trance states so common in yogic practice and developed a means by which people can acquire insight without the aid of a therapist or psychedelic drugs. Two approaches are employed.

The easier approach to insight is one which both Monks and lay practitioners can use regardless of their meditative development. It consists in developing the habit of reflecting on one's feelings from time to time and detecting the motives that produce seemingly spontaneous words and deeds. "Why did I say that?" "Why am I tense when I meet so and so?" "I find myself disliking such and such a character in this novel. Why is that? Of whom does he remind me?"

For those who have progressed in the breathing meditation or made similar progress at quieting the mind, unconscious feelings become more readily accessible. As one begins to shut out sensory distractions and halt discursive thinking, more subtle sensations come into awareness. At first, there may be only a vague feeling of anxiety, some unexplained sense of guilt, or a feeling of anger. Without recourse to verbal whys or hows and avoiding any speculative conjecture, the meditator directs full attention to the feeling alone. He brings only the feeling itself into full awareness and allows no interfering thoughts, though later he will benefit by reflecting on it in a contemplative manner. It is at this point that repressed memories and emotional conflicts may come into awareness. Here also, meditation can be potentially dangerous for those whose personality structures are weakly constituted or who have repressed emotional problems of severe intensity. Usually, however, in these latter instances, one's unconscious defenses will intervene, and the meditator will terminate the practice because he or she feels anxious, or "can't concentrate", or "just quit because I felt like it."

Thus, the last three sections of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta read as follows:

Mindfulness of feelings — the second of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness:

[38] *An Experiment in Mindfulness*.
[39] *Majjhima Nikāya*, 123.

"Herein, Monks, a Monk, when experiencing a pleasant feeling, knows, 'I am experiencing a pleasant feeling'; when experiencing a painful feeling, he knows, 'I am experiencing a painful feeling'; when experiencing a neutral feeling, he knows, 'I am experiencing a neutral feeling…'"

Mindfulness of the state of the mind — the third of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness:

"Herein, Monks, a Monk knows the mind with lust, as with lust; the mind without lust, as without lust; the mind with hate, as with hate; the mind without hate, as without hate; the mind with ignorance, as with ignorance; the mind without ignorance, as without ignorance; the shrunken (that is, rigid and indolent) state of the mind as the shrunken state; the distracted (that is, restless) state of the mind as the distracted state; the developed state of the mind as the developed state; the undeveloped state of the mind as the undeveloped state…"

Mindfulness of mental objects — the fourth of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness:

"Herein, Monks, when sense-desire is present, a Monk knows, 'Sense-desire is present in me,' or when sense-desire is not present, he knows, 'No sense-desire is present in me.' He knows how the arising of the non-arisen sense-desire comes to be; he knows how the abandoning of the arisen sense-desire comes to be; and he knows how the non-arising in the future of the abandoned sense-desire comes to be.

"When anger is present, he knows, 'Anger is present in me.'… (as above for sense-desire) … When sloth and torpor are present… When agitation and worry are present… When doubt is present… (as above)."

"Herein, Monks, when the enlightenment-factor of mindfulness is present, the Monk knows, 'The enlightenment-factor of mindfulness is present in me,' or when the enlightenment-factor of mindfulness is absent, he knows, 'The enlightenment-factor of mindfulness is not present in me'; and he knows how the arising of the non-arisen enlightenment-factor of mindfulness comes to be; and how the perfection in the development of the arisen enlightenment-factor of mindfulness comes to be."

This paragraph on mindfulness is then repeated in the same wording for the remaining six factors of enlightenment (*bojjhanga*): (1) investigation of reality; (2) energy; (3) happiness; (4) tranquility; (5) concentration; and (6) equanimity. These seven conditions bear the title "factors of enlightenment" since they are said to be the essential states for the realization of *nibbāna*.

Leaving the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta for a moment, we note another of the *Buddha's* sayings:

"Is there a way, Monks, by which a Monk, without recourse to faith, to cherished opinions, to tradition, to specious reasoning, to the approval of views pondered upon, may declare the Final Knowledge [of Sainthood]?… There is such a way, O Monks. And which is it? Herein, Monks, a Monk has seen a form with his eyes, and if greed, hate or delusion are in him, he knows: 'Greed, hate, delusion are present in me'; and if greed, hate or delusion are not present in him, he knows: 'No greed, hate, delusion are present in me.' Further, Monks, a Monk has heard a sound, smelled an odor, tasted a flavor, felt a tactile sensation, cognized a mental object (idea), and if greed, hate or delusion are

present in him, he knows: 'Greed, hate, delusion are present in me'; and if greed, hate or delusion are not present in him, he knows: 'No greed, hate, delusion are present in me.' And if he thus knows, O Monks, are these ideas such as to be known by recourse to faith, to cherished opinions, to tradition, to specious reasoning, to the approval of views pondered upon?"

"Certainly not, Lord."

"Are these not rather ideas to be known after wisely realizing them by experience?"

"That is so, Lord."

"This, Monks, is a way by which a Monk, without recourse to faith, to cherished opinions, to tradition, to specious reasoning, to the approval of views pondered upon, may declare the Final Knowledge (of Sainthood)."[40]

Thus far, we have discussed how one achieves insight as the first step towards eliminating unwholesome feelings and motivations. Following insight, one must totally confront these newly discovered feelings and acknowledge them fully and impartially. One must see their true nature devoid of any emotional reactions (such as guilt or craving) and devoid of preconceived notions about their good or evil qualities. In other words, complete attention is focused on the feeling itself in order that one may examine it objectively in its naked reality, free of any cultural and personal assumptions as to its desirability. This achievement results from the *satipaṭṭhāna* practices described above.[41]

As an example, in a typical case of anger, one is cognizant of being angry, yet a much greater amount of attention is directed outward. Most typically, the angry mind quickly perceives and dwells upon the objectionable and offensive features of some other person (or persons). And in so doing, indignation, resentment, and anger increase. These objectionable features of the other person may be fancied, exaggerated, or real, but in any case, were it not for the anger, such preoccupations would not have arisen. The Buddhist approach is to turn attention to the real problem — the anger. One reflects, "I am angry."… "I am doing this because I am angry."… "I am having these thoughts because I am angry." In so doing, one avoids dwelling on alleged injustices, etc., and, thereby, does not intensify the hatred. This reflection continues, "This is anger."… "It is real; it is intense."… "It is a feeling."… "It has no reality outside of my own consciousness."… "Like all feelings, it will soon diminish."… "I experience it but am not compelled to act on it." With practice, one finds that, though anger still arises, its effect is diminished. Its influence is no longer as strong. In the case of painful emotions, such as humiliation, it is advantageous to also reflect, "This is most painful."… "I do not like it; but I can confront it."… "I can endure it."… "Even though it is unpleasant, I can tolerate it." In instances of greed and passion, it is often fruitful to consider "Is this truly pleasurable?"… "Is it rewarding?"… "Am I happy now?"

It should be noted that this important technique can also be employed in the course of daily living without unusual powers of concentration or formal meditation practice.

In the words of the *Buddha*:

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[40] *Saṁyutta Nikāya*, 35:152. The reader will note that this passage also demonstrates the highly experiential aspect of Buddhist epistemology.

[41] *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, pp. 68—70.

"There are three kinds of feeling, O Monks: pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling, and neutral feeling. For the full understanding of these three kinds of feelings, O Monks, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness should be cultivated."[42]

"In pleasant feelings, Monks, the inclination to greed should be given up; in unpleasant feelings, the inclination to aversion should be given up; in neutral feelings, the inclination to ignorance should be given up. If a Monk has given up the inclination to greed in pleasant feelings, the inclination to aversion in unpleasant feelings, and the inclination to ignorance in neutral feelings, then, he is called one who is free of [unsalutary] inclinations, one who sees clearly. He has cut off cravings, sundered the fetters, and through the destruction of conceit, has made an end of suffering."

"If one feels joy, but does not know feeling's nature,
Bent towards greed, he will not find deliverance.
If one feels pain, but does not know feeling's nature,
Bent towards hate, he will not find deliverance.
And even neutral feeling, which is peaceful,
The Lord of Wisdom has proclaimed,
If, in attachment, he should cling to it,
This will not set him free from the round of suffering.
But if a Monk is ardent and does not neglect
To practice mindfulness and clear comprehension,
He will penetrate the nature of all feelings.
And having done so, in this very life,
He will be free from cankers, from all taints.
Mature in knowledge, firm in Dhamma's ways,
When once his life-span ends, his body breaks,
All measure and concepts will be transcended."[43]

After getting rid of sensual cravings and after uncovering, confronting, and relinquishing unwholesome emotions, there remains only one fetter to be resolved. This is narcissism, the infatuation for one's self, which results in egotism, and an endless quest for social recognition and self-exaltation. Perpetuating this fetter is the illusion that one has a true or unchanging self, the "real me". In reality, there is no such entity; instead, there are only feelings, sensations, and emotions, and once we gain full appreciation of this fact, once it becomes a living reality to us, narcissism diminishes. Among the *Buddha's* Teachings, there are numerous passages such as the following:

"There is no corporeality, no feeling, no perception, no mental formations, no consciousness that is permanent, enduring and lasting, and that, not subject to any change, will eternally remain the same. If there existed such an ego that is permanent,

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[42] *Saṁyutta Nikāya*, 47:49.
[43] *Saṁyutta Nikāya*, 36:3.

enduring and lasting, and not subject to any change, then, the holy life leading to the complete extinction of suffering would not be possible.'[44]

It would be better to consider the body as the ego rather than the mind. And why? Because this body may last for ten, twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty years, even for a hundred years and more. But that which is called "mind, consciousness, thinking", arises continuously, during day and night, first as one thing and then as something different again. No sooner does it arise, then it vanishes.[45]

Such statements, however, are merely philosophical arguments through which one may intellectually accept this fact. Only by experiencing it as a living reality and by an impartial analysis of the self do we relinquish egotism. Thus, in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, after each of the six body meditations and after each of the meditations on feelings, the state of the mind, and mental objects, the following passage occurs. (Quoted here is the section on feelings. The words "body", "state of the mind", and "mental objects" are substituted for the word "feelings" in their respective sections of the *sutta*.)

> *"Thus, he lives contemplating feelings in himself, or he lives contemplating feelings in other persons, or he lives contemplating feelings both in himself and in others. He lives contemplating origination-factors in feelings, or he lives contemplating dissolution-factors in feelings, or he lives contemplating origination-and-dissolution factors in feelings. Or his mindfulness is established with the thought, 'Feeling exists,' to the extent necessary just for knowledge and mindfulness, and he lives independent, and clings to nothing in the world. Thus, Monks, a Monk lives contemplating feelings."*

In the instance of anger, one would reflect: "This is anger."… "It is a feeling."… "I do not identify with it."… "It will eventually be replaced by another feeling, which, in turn, will be replaced by still another."… "I am a composite of various feelings; a changing aggregate of attitudes, values, and thoughts; no one of which is permanent."… "There is no eternal I." As such objectivity and detachment increases, anger diminishes, for no longer is there an ego to be defended and no self which can be offended.

Except for a concluding section on the Four Noble Truths, we have now discussed all but two portions of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. These remaining two are included under the section on mental objects and are primarily intended to free one from sensual craving and the illusion of self:

> *"Herein, Monks, a Monk thinks: 'Thus is material form; thus is the arising of material form; and thus is the disappearance of material form. Thus is feeling; thus is the arising of feeling; and thus is the disappearance of feeling. Thus is perception; thus is the arising of perception; and thus is the disappearance of perception. Thus are (predisposing) mental formations; thus is the arising of mental formations; and thus is the disappearance of mental formations. Thus is consciousness; thus is the arising of consciousness; and thus is the disappearance of consciousness'."*

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[44] *Saṁyutta Nikāya*, 22:96.
[45] *Saṁyutta Nikāya*, 12:61.

> *"Herein, Monks, a Monk knows the eye and visual forms, and the fetter that arises dependent on both; he knows how the arising of the non-arisen fetter comes to be; he knows how the abandoning of the arisen fetter comes to be; and he knows how the non-arising in the future of the abandoned fetter comes to be."*

This latter passage is repeated five times with "ear and sound", "nose and smells", "tongue and flavors", "body and tactual objects", and "mind and mental objects" respectively substituted where "eye and visual forms" appears above.

We have thus completed our discussion of the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta. In summary, it first prescribes mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*) as a technique for quieting the mind and developing concentration (*samādhi*). This same heightened awareness is then developed for all voluntary physical actions. Next are the meditations on repulsiveness, elements, and death, which are intended to free one from bodily attachment and lust; this is done by contemplating the temporary and changing nature of the body and by developing negative and unpleasant associations with it. The remaining three sections enable practitioners to become fully aware of their thoughts, feelings, and emotions and to confront them impartially in their true nature. With each of these exercises, one also objectively notes that each facet of one's own mind and body is temporary, compounded, and changing, and, therefore, there exists no immortal soul, unchanging essence, or true self.

One important fact should be noted. Neither in the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta nor in any of the other seven steps of the Noble Eightfold Path is the denial or suppression of feelings advocated. It is a widely spread and inaccurate belief that Theravādin Buddhism attempts to destroy unwholesome thoughts by forcing them from the mind. Suppression of undesirable thoughts by such a method is not the preferred approach, though it is recommended in a few places in the Pāḷi Canon in special cases when other measures fail.[46]

In southern Asia, it is becoming a common practice for both Monks and lay practitioners to enter a meditation center for periods of from six to twelve weeks. Here, one dons the white robe of an *upāsaka* or *upāsikā* and is removed from all social contacts and material possessions. Previous social status and identity soon come to have little meaning, thus minimizing the effect of established habits and adaptations and, thereby, enhancing the opportunities for personal growth. The food is palatable but bland, and one eats and sleeps in moderation according to a strict schedule, and even eating and dressing become routine meditation practices. Virtually every waking moment is dedicated to meditation. Here, progress is made at a rate impossible to achieve by setting aside an hour or two in the midst of a busy day. After their stay is over, the lay practitioners return to family life and continue their daily one-hour practice. However, not all meditation centers are of high quality. Many are lax, a few are corrupt, and a few teach unorthodox meditation practices which are not truly Buddhist. Thus, a person seeking entry should first make inquiries and would do well to avoid centers which make an effort to recruit Westerners for the sake of publicity and prestige.

Reputable *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation centers exist in North America,[47] and courses are also given in England.

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[46] *The Removal of Distracting Thoughts.* Translation by Soma Thera. Buddhist Publication Society, Wheel no. 21.

[47] Such as the International Meditation Center (IMC) in Westminster, Maryland, and the Bhāvanā Society in High View, West Virginia.

The Eighth Step

The last step of the Noble Eightfold Path is termed "Right Concentration" and concerns the attainment of the four form, or fine material, absorptions (*rūpajjhāna*). These states are achieved by an extreme degree of concentration and mental quietude beyond that usually sought through the practice of mindfulness of breathing. Yet, unlike *satipaṭṭhāna*, the *jhānas* are not a prerequisite to Enlightenment. Some teachers say one may obtain *nibbāna* without reaching the absorptions, and they alone will not produce *nibbāna*. Also, there is the danger of one becoming enamored with them and not striving for further progress. However, achieving the *jhānas* can facilitate one's progress.[48]

In these states, all visual, tactile, auditory, and other sense impressions have ceased, while the mind remains alert and fully awake. The first *jhāna* is described as having five qualities absent and five present. Absent are the five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*): (1) desire for gratification of the senses; (2) hatred, anger, ill will; (3) sloth and torpor; (4) agitation and worry; and (5) doubt, or indecisiveness. Present are the five *jhāna* factors (*jhānanga*): (1) a mild degree of conceptual thought, or initial application; (2) sustained application; (3) rapture, ecstasy, bliss; (4) happiness; and (5) one-pointed concentration coupled with equanimity.

With the removal of all conceptual thought and discursive thinking, one enters the second *jhāna*, which has the qualities of rapture, happiness, and one-pointed concentration. Then, with the abandonment of rapture, one enters the third *jhāna*, in which only happiness and one-pointed concentration remain. The distinctive factors of the fourth absorption are equanimity and one-pointed concentration. This last *jhāna* is realized after giving up all joy and sorrow and is described as a state beyond pleasure and pain.[49]

The *jhānas* are obtained by mindfulness of breathing with a steady, progressive quieting of the breath.[50] They may also be realized through the *kasiṇa* meditations and by meditating on equanimity.[51]

At this point, it is interesting to speculate on the phenomena of parapsychology. Despite the many fraudulent and careless investigations which have been done in parapsychology research, there still remains a sizable number of reliable and carefully controlled studies (especially in England) which have demonstrated that people do, indeed, possess the faculties of telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition (that is, respectively, the abilities to read another's thoughts, to see or know distant happenings beyond the range of normal vision, and to foretell future events). In addition, some researchers claim to have established the existence of psychokinesis, the power of mind over matter, but the evidence for psychokinesis is inconclusive and most experiments have failed to demonstrate its validity. Of those parapsychology subjects who have been tested to date, even the best guess incorrectly as often as correctly and are unable to determine which of their guesses are correct. That is, while being tested, the ESP subject is unable to distinguish between guesses and true extra-sensory information.[52] One might wonder if the process of reducing sensory impressions and stilling discursive thoughts would enhance these psychic abilities.

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[48] *The Word of the Buddha*, by Nyanatiloka Mahāthera (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society), p. 79.
[49] *The Word of the Buddha*, by Nyanatiloka Mahāthera (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society), pp. 80—81.
[50] *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, p. 111.
[51] *Visuddhimagga*, III, 107.
[52] *Psychical Research Today*, by D. J. West (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books [1962]).

According to the Pāḷi texts, there are five psychic powers which can be obtained through meditation. These five include psychokinesis, telepathy, and clairvoyance, plus two others. The additional two are the "divine ear", or clairaudience (the auditory counterpart of clairvoyance), and the ability to recall past lives.[53] Precognition itself is not listed among these but is mentioned in other sections of the *Tipiṭaka*. Reliable use of these powers is allegedly possessed only by those who have mastered the fourth form, or fine material, *jhāna*, either with or without *nibbāna*.[54] Thus, like more worldly talents, *nibbāna* alone does not produce them.[55]

The most important consideration, however, is that Buddhism places very little emphasis on paranormal phenomena and regards them as by-products of spiritual development rather than goals. In fact, the novice is cautioned against experimenting with them, since they distract from one's true goals and, in some cases, can be obstructive or even dangerous.[56]

Supernormal powers are the supernormal powers of the ordinary man. They are hard to maintain, and the slightest disturbance breaks them. Moreover, they are an impediment for insight, though not for concentration, since they are obtainable through concentration. Hence, the supernormal powers are an impediment that should be severed by one who seeks insight, that is, by everyone.[57]

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[53] *The Word of the Buddha*, pp. 67—68.
[54] *The Word of the Buddha*, p. 68.
[55] *Visuddhimagga*, XII, 11.
[56] *Dīgha Nikāya*, no. 11, Kevaḍḍha Sutta.
[57] *Visuddhimagga*, III, 56.

Other Forms of Meditation

The *satipaṭṭhāna* exercises are by far the most valuable and widely practiced of all the Theravādin meditations. There are, however, a total of forty meditation subjects (*kammaṭṭhāna*) listed in the *Visuddhimagga*, including those already mentioned, that is, *satipaṭṭhāna* practices and meditations on loving-kindness, equanimity, repulsiveness of food, and the *Buddha*. The remaining subjects are the *Dhamma*, the Order of Monks (*Sangha*), virtue, generosity, celestial beings, peace, compassion, gladness, boundless space, boundless consciousness, nothingness, the base of neither perception nor non-perception, and the ten *kasiṇas*. Each of these subjects is intended for specific individual needs, and one should not attempt to undertake all forty. To do so would only dilute one's energies and retard progress.

A *kasiṇa* is an object (such as a clay disk, a flame, or color) which the practitioner looks at from a distance of about four feet. The eyes are alternately opened and closed until one has acquired a mental image of the object which is as vivid as the real one.[58] The ten *kasiṇa* meditations develop the *jhānas* but do not enhance insight (*vipassanā*).

Meditation is not an exclusively Buddhist tradition. It is equally important in the Hindu religion, and because the two schools employ similar techniques, they are often confused. Thus, a comparison is warranted. Both advocate preparatory moral discipline, moderation in eating, quieting the mind, and abolition of selfish desires. The postures are similar, and the breathing meditation is practiced by many yogis. Here, however, the similarities cease. Buddhism is concerned with the empirical phenomena of conscious experience, and, thus, its meditations are psychologically oriented. Hinduism, on the other hand, is mystically, religiously, and metaphysically oriented. Yogic meditation, therefore, has devotional aspects, often including prayer. While Buddhism emphasizes motivations and insight, Hinduism speaks of Infinite Consciousness, Cosmic Reality, and oneness with God. In Hinduism, freedom from hatred, for example, is not so much an end in itself as it is a step towards immortality. The following typifies Hindu writings:

> *Retire into a solitary room. Close your eyes. Have deep silent meditation. Feel his (God's) presence. Repeat His name OM with fervor, joy and love. Fill your heart with love. Destroy the Saṅkalpas, thoughts, whims, fancies, and desires when they arise from the surface of the mind. Withdraw the wandering mind and fix it upon the Lord. Now, Nishta, meditation will become deep and intense. Do not open your eyes. Do not stir from your seat. Merge in Him. Dive deep into the innermost recesses of the heart. Plunge into the shining Ātma (Soul) within. Drink the nectar of Immortality. Enjoy the silence now. I shall leave you there alone. Nectar's son, Rejoice, Rejoice! Peace, Peace! Silence, Silence! Glory, Glory!*[59]

Another important difference concerns the visions that may occur during meditation. Buddhism regards such visions as psychological phenomena to be dealt with in the same way as distracting thoughts, while Hinduism often interprets them as psychic experiences indicative of spiritual development. In the words of Swami Sivananda:

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[58] *Visuddhimagga*, IV, 30.

[59] *Concentration and Meditation*, by Swami Sivananda (Himalayas, India: Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy [1959]), p. 314.

Sometimes Devatas (gods), Rishis (sages), Nitya Siddhas will appear in meditation. Receive them with honor. Bow to them. Get advice from them. They appear before you to help and give you encouragement.[60]

A few passages in the *Dao-De-Jing* (*Tao-Te-Ching*) suggest that the Chinese mystics discovered meditation independently of Buddhist and Hindu traditions:

Can you govern your animal soul, hold to the One and never depart from it?
Can you throttle your breath, down to the softness of breath in a child?
Can you purify your mystic vision and wash it until it is spotless? (v. 10)

Stop your senses,
Close the doors;
Let sharp things be blunted,
Tangles resolved,
The light tempered
And turmoil subdued;
For this is mystic unity
In which the Wise Man is moved
Neither by affection
Nor yet by estrangement
Or profit or loss
Or honor or shame.
Accordingly, by all the world,
He is held highest. (v. 56)

To know that you are ignorant is best;
To know what you do not, is a disease;
But if you recognize the malady
Of mind for what it is, then that is health.
The Wise Man has indeed a healthy mind;
He sees an aberration as it is
And for that reason never will be ill. (v. 71)[61]

The exact nature of early Daoist meditation will probably remain unknown, since later Daoism has intermingled with Mahāyāna Buddhism.

Mahāyāna Buddhist meditations include all the above mentioned Theravādin practices plus others. The division of Mahāyāna into numerous and varied sects precludes any general statement about its practices. In some forms, it bears similarities to Hinduism by virtue of devotional emphasis and prayer. In other schools, this similarity is seen in the Mahāyāna concepts of Universal Mind, the Void, and *Buddha*-Nature, which sometimes take precedence

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[60] *Concentration and Meditation*, by Swami Sivananda (Himalayas, India: Yoga Vedanta Forest Academy [1959]), p. 171.
[61] *The Way of Life: Tao-Te-Ching.* Translation by R. B. Blakney (New York: The New American Library [1955]).

over the Theravādin concerns of greed, hatred, and delusion. The curing of physical illness and the flow of spiritual forces through the body are other features of certain Mahāyāna practices:

> *Vibrations (during meditation) show the free passage of the vital principle. As it passes through the stomach and intestines, it vibrates when the belly is empty. But when the belly is full, it ceases to vibrate. The breath reaches the lower belly more easily when the latter is full. Vibrations are not accidental but come from the vital principle circulating in the belly. As time passes, when your meditation is more effective and the vital principle flows freely, then these vibrations will cease.*[62]

Of all the Mahāyāna schools, Zen places the greatest emphasis upon meditation. Zen practice is much like Theravādin. It focuses on quieting the mind and shuns conceptual thinking in preference to direct experience. The postures are also similar, and the initial Zen practice usually involves attention to breathing. It does not include as wide a variety of different techniques. Zen places greater emphasis on the details of correct posture and, especially in the Soto School, contrasts with the Theravādin School by preferring group meditation to individual practice. In order to cultivate a suitable state of mind, Zen meditation is often followed by chanting and gongs.

Perhaps the most significant difference is that, as compared to the Theravādin School, Zen makes little mention of the need and means of dealing with motives, feelings, and emotions. It lays great emphasis upon freeing oneself from intellectualizing and conceptualizing in one's quest of "the Ultimate". But at the same time, it offers scant advice on the means by which one overcomes unwholesome impulses or confronts mental hindrances that are emotional or motivational in origin.

[62] *The Secrets of Chinese Meditation*, by Charles Luk (London: Rider & Co. [1964]), p. 187.

Scientific Evaluations of Meditation

Venerable Anuruddha, a disciple of the *Buddha*, once became ill with a painful disease. On that occasion, several of the Monks visited him and inquired:

> *"What might be the state of mind dwelling in which painful bodily sensations are unable to perturb the mind of the Venerable Anuruddha?"*
>
> *He replied:*
>
> *"It is a state of mind, brothers, that is firmly grounded in the Four Foundations of Mindfulness; and due to that, painful bodily sensations cannot perturb my mind."*[63]

Throughout Buddhist history, there have been numerous other testimonies concerning the benefits of *satipaṭṭhāna*. Yet, personal testimonies and case histories are subjective and prone to distortion. The reader may well wonder what, if any, scientific studies have been conducted. To date, there are two areas of investigation which have given some evidence as to the benefits of meditation.[64]

Sensory Deprivation

The first scientific evidence does not involve meditation *per se*, but concerns an experimental situation which has some similarities to meditation practice. This is sensory deprivation, which has been actively studied since 1951. There are two types of sensory deprivation. One reduces sensory input by placing the experimental subject in a totally dark, soundproof room. His hands are encased in soft cotton; the temperature is constant and mild, and he lies on a soft mattress. The other type does not reduce sensory input *per se*, but does diminish perception. In this latter case, the subject wears opaque goggles so that he sees only a diffuse white with no forms or colors. A constant monotonous noise is generated, and no other sounds are heard. Approximately the same results are obtained in either type of experiment. In both kinds, the subject lies relatively motionless; he is free to think or sleep as he pleases and may terminate the session if he so desires. Experiments have lasted from four hours to five days.[65] The lack of practice and lack of any attempt at mental discipline makes sensory deprivation a passive procedure notably different from meditation. However, both meditation and sensory deprivation involve a temporary withdrawal from external stimuli without loss of consciousness, and, thus, a comparison is warranted. Perhaps the most characteristic feature of sensory deprivation research to date is the great discrepancies in the findings of different researchers. For example, some studies have shown it to impair learning, while others find that learning is enhanced.[66] Most of the early studies reported that the great majority (in some cases all) of experimental subjects had strong visual and sometimes auditory hallucinations beginning

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[63] *Saṁyutta Nikāya*, 52:10.
[64] Further studies have been conducted since this essay was written (1964—1965).
[65] *Sensory Deprivation*, by Solomon, Kubzansky, Leiderman, Mendelson, Trumbull, and Wexler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press [1961]).
[66] *Science*, "Effect of Sensory Deprivation on Learning Rate in Human Beings", by J. Vernon and J. Hoffman, Vol. 123 (June 15, 1956), pp. 1074—1075.

from twenty minutes to seventy hours after entering the experiment. Other researchers, however, reported very few hallucinations. Suggestion is a partial, though not total, explanation for this difference in frequency of hallucinations. One study found that, under identical sensory deprivation, conditions, a group of subjects which was told that hallucinations were frequent and normal had over three times more than an identical group which was given no such information.[67] This, no doubt, explains many of the psychic experiences of those yogi devotees who seek visions while meditating in isolation.

Recent studies have indicated that the emotional atmosphere created by the experimenters, plus the subject's attitudes, knowledge, and expectations, may have greater effect on the results of the experiment than do the physical aspects of sensory deprivation.[68] Regarding meditation, this fact suggests the importance of moral, intellectual, and environmental preparation. It also suggests the importance of taking a few moments before meditation to create a wholesome frame of mind.

What is most significant for the purpose of this writing, however, is whether or not sensory deprivation and its accompanying social isolation facilitate awareness of one's inner emotional conflicts and thereby facilitate personality growth. Several studies have indicated that such is the case. Most significant was an experiment conducted on thirty white male psychiatric patients in Richmond, Virginia. The group consisted of approximately equal numbers of neurotics, schizophrenics, and character disorders, and all were subjected to a maximum six hours of sensory deprivation. Each subject was given a battery of psychological tests the day before the experiment, and the same tests were repeated the day after and again one week later. The tests rated the subjects on twenty items such as anxiety, depression, hostility, memory deficit, disorganized thinking, etc. It was found that, on each of the twenty items, some subjects improved, some worsened, and some revealed no change. However, the desirable changes outnumbered the undesirable ones by a ratio of two to one, and one week after the experiment, most of the beneficial changes were found to have persisted, while the undesirable ones had mostly subsided. Some subjects showed no desirable changes on any of the twenty items; others revealed as many as thirteen. The average subject improved on four of the twenty items and worsened on two. The experimenters also reported that the subjects displayed "increased awareness of inner conflicts and anxieties, and heightened perception of the fact that their difficulties stemmed from inner rather than outer factors… A second major change observed was a less rigid utilization of repressive and inhibitory defenses. The reduction of incoming stimulation led to recall and verbalization of previously forgotten experiences in many instances. For some subjects this recall was anxiety-inducing…"[69]

Other studies have supported this finding that short-term sensory deprivation is psychologically beneficial. (Deprivation of a day or more is likely to be detrimental.) However, other carefully conducted investigations have found no such improvements,[70] and, therefore,

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[67] *Archives of General Psychiatry*, "Studies in Sensory Deprivation", by J. Pollard, L. Uhr, and W. Jackson, Vol. 8 (May, 1963), pp. 435—453.

[68] *Archives of General Psychiatry*, "Studies in Sensory Deprivation", by J. Pollard, L. Uhr, and W. Jackson, Vol. 8 (May, 1963), pp. 435—453.

[69] *Archives of General Psychiatry*, "Therapeutic Changes in Psychiatric Patients Following Partial Sensory Deprivation", by R. Gibby, H. Adams, and R. Carrera, Vol. 3 (July, 1960), pp. 57/33—66/42.

[70] *Archives of General Psychiatry*, "Therapeutic Effectiveness of Sensory Deprivation", by S. Cleveland, E. Reitman, & C. Bentinck, Vol. 8 (May, 1963), pp. 455—460.

further studies are needed before any definite conclusions can be made about the therapeutic value of sensory deprivation.

Electroencephalographic Analysis of Meditation

In 1963, a fascinating and unique report on Zen meditation was presented by Dr. Akira Kasamatsu and Dr. Tomio Hirai of the Department of Neuro-Psychiatry, Tokyo University. It contained the results of a ten-year study of the brain wave, or electroencephalographic (EEG), tracings of Zen masters.[71] [72]

The EEG tracings revealed that about ninety seconds after an accomplished Zen practitioner begins meditation, a rhythmic slowing in the brain wave pattern known as “alpha waves” occurs. This slowing occurs *with eyes open* and progresses with meditation, and after thirty minutes, one finds rhythmic alpha waves of seven or eight per second. This effect persists for some minutes after meditation. What is most significant is that this EEG pattern is notably different from those of sleep, normal waking consciousness, and hypnotic trance, and is unusual in persons who have not made considerable progress in meditation. In other words, it suggests an unusual mental state; though, from the subjective reports of the practitioners, it does not appear to be a unique or highly unusual conscious experience. It was also found that a Zen master’s evaluation of the amount of progress another practitioner had made correlated directly with the latter’s EEG changes.

Another finding of the same study concerned what is called “alpha blocking” and habituation. To understand these phenomena, let us imagine that a person who is reading quietly is suddenly interrupted by a loud noise. For a few seconds, his attention is diverted from the reading to the noise. If the same sound is then repeated a few seconds later, his attention will again be diverted, only not as strongly, nor for as long a period of time. If the sound is then repeated at regular intervals, the person will continue reading and become oblivious to the sound. A normal subject with closed eyes produces alpha waves on an EEG tracing. An auditory stimulation, such as a loud noise, normally obliterates alpha waves for seven seconds or more — this is termed “alpha blocking”. In a Zen master, the alpha blocking produced by the first noise lasts only two seconds. If the noise is repeated at 15 second intervals, we find that, in the normal subject, there is virtually no alpha blocking remaining by the fifth successive noise. This diminution of alpha blocking is termed “habituation” and persists in normal subjects for as long as the noise continues at regular and frequent intervals. In the Zen master, however, no habituation is seen. His alpha blocking lasts two seconds with the first sound, two seconds with the fifth sound, and two seconds with the twentieth sound. This implies that the Zen master has a greater awareness of his environment as the paradoxical result of meditative concentration. One master described such a state of mind as that of noticing every person he sees on the street but of not looking back with emotional lingering.

[71] *The Science of Zazen* (a 16 mm. sound motion picture and accompanying pamphlet, both in English), by A. Kasamatsu and T. Hirai (Tokyo University [April, 1963]).
[72] *Folia Psychiatrica et Neurologica Japonica*, “An Electroencephalographic Study of the Zen Meditation (Zazen) ”, by Akira Kasamatsu and Tomio Hirai, Vol. 20, no. 4 (December, 1966), pp. 315—336.

The Social Fruits of Meditation

Through science, technology, and social organization, Western man has built a civilization of unprecedented wealth and grandeur. Yet despite this mastery of his environment, he has given little thought to mastery of himself. In fact, his newly-acquired wealth and leisure have heightened his sensuality and weakened his self-discipline. It becomes increasingly apparent, however, that a stable and prosperous democracy can endure only so long as we have intelligent, self-disciplined, and properly motivated citizens; legislation and education alone will not ensure this. Buddhism presents a technique by which this can be obtained, but the responsibility rests with each individual. No one can cure our neuroses and strengthen our characters except ourselves.

In the Sumbha country in the town of Sedaka the *Buddha* once said:

> *"'I shall protect myself', in that way, the foundations of mindfulness should be practiced. 'I shall protect others', in that way, the foundations of mindfulness should be practiced. Protecting oneself, one protects others; protecting others, one protects oneself. And how does one, in protecting oneself, protect others? By the repeated and frequent practice of meditation. And how does one, in protecting others, protect oneself? By patience and forbearance, by a non-violent and harmless life, by loving-kindness and compassion. 'I shall protect myself', in that way, the foundations of mindfulness should be practiced. 'I shall protect others', in that way, the foundations of mindfulness should be practiced. Protecting oneself, one protects others; protecting others, one protects oneself."*[73]

[73] *Saṁyutta Nikāya*, 47:19.

Appendix

Some Observations and Suggestions for Insight Meditation

The preceding was written in 1964 with a few minor revisions and additions made in the latter part of 1965. Now, at the start of 1972 and after six years in Thailand, it seems befitting that I review my own words. For, the past years have not only added to my own experience with meditation, they have also brought me into close and prolonged contact (often close friendships) with other meditation practitioners, many of whom are more dedicated, more skillful, and more experienced than I.

One is impressed with the variety of personalities who undertake practice. Some are experimental, critical, and pragmatic; others more devotional, dedicated, and idealistic. Some seem well adjusted and at peace with themselves and the world, while others seem desperate to find happiness and purpose in life. Some adhere literally to every detail of the scriptures, while some, instead, are dedicated to the interpretations and methods of their respective teachers. Still others attempt to find the ways and means alone by their own individual and unaided efforts. Likewise, the techniques and methods which these people have undertaken are also highly varied and divergent.

During this period of personal practice and consultation with others, I have seen what I believe to be some genuine achievements and also some notable failures. The question then is: What is it that succeeds and what is it that does not? And why? Or to state the matter more precisely: One may succeed in one area of meditative development but not in another.

In order to evaluate progress at meditation, one must have some criteria or standards against which to judge. Thus, we must ask ourselves, what is it that, short of *nibbāna*, we expect to find in one who has made genuine progress along the Noble Eightfold Path? Momentary periods of euphoria, altered perceptions, or other transient episodes of unusual or altered states of consciousness are not what we seek. Likewise, we are not in pursuit of occult powers, unusual EEG patterns, or control of the autonomic nervous system (such as slowing the heart rate or changing body temperature).

With reference to the Four Noble Truths, we may note the words of the *Buddha*: "One thing do I teach: suffering (*dukkha*) and the end of suffering (*nirodha*)." Thus, if one has truly progressed, we would expect that, where previously sad and depressed, one is now less so; where previously selfish, one is now more giving; where previously defensive, secretive, and guarded, one is now more open and self-assured. Worry and anxiety should be reduced. Objective humility should replace conceit. Instead of recurrent thoughts of anger and "getting even", one is more forgiving and at peace with the world. Indeed, such attainments have been observed, occurring as the result of properly directed Buddhist practice.

Again, with reference to the Four Noble Truths, it is craving (*taṇhā*), or desire, which causes our unhappiness and produces our mental defilements (*kilesa*). Thus, only by attacking the problems of craving, wanting, and desiring can progress be made. I speak now not so much of the crude and obvious desires such as hunger and sex but of the more subtle ones of egotism, emotional dependency, and desires for possession. One may fast for two weeks and yet never once look at the fact that the real reason for fasting is to feed one's ego — to be better, more disciplined, more pious than one's fellow practitioners. Or one may work diligently attempting to win the approval, confidence, and affection of a stern and aloof teacher and never once realize

that one is attempting to compensate for the frustration and lack of love from a stern and aloof parent. To really break through these "hang ups" one must focus attention, not on the sensation of breath at the tip of the nose, but instead focus on the agonizing feelings of inadequacy, mediocrity, loneliness, or rejection in one's heart.

When asked "What have you gained from meditation?", the correct answer should be "nothing". For meditation is not for acquiring but for giving up — a full and complete giving up of the self. Too often, people put in a half-hour each day at meditation in the same way that they put in a half-hour studying French. After so many months or years, one has a new attribute, a new skill to add to one's already impressive repertoire of virtues, achievements, talents, and abilities. "I can speak French, play the piano, ski, type sixty words a minute, and meditate as well." Such a person is either compensating for strong feelings of inadequacy or else is badly afflicted with narcissism.

Another way in which meditation becomes misdirected, as a result of the very motives which determined it, is the quest for new sensations or experiences, that is, *lobha*, or "greed". Many seek from meditation the very same thing they seek from drugs — that is, an overwhelming ego-immersing experience of sensations, perceptions, colors, emotions, and "transcendental states beyond words".

It is not meant to belittle such experiences and say that they have no significance or no value. But, as with taking psychedelic substances such as LSD or seeing a good motion picture, they quickly pass into memories. And once past, in a very short time, one's old mood changes, petty jealousies, conceits, and irritations are back just as strong and as frequent as ever. If there has been no true and lasting personality change, then Buddhist meditation has fallen short of its intended goal.

At the opposite extreme are persons whose approaches to Buddhism are excessively dogmatic, literal, orthodox, and moralistic. They strongly resist a pragmatic, eclectic approach to meditation and are excessively concerned with the nuances and fine points of Buddhist tradition and decorum. From these sources, one repeatedly hears such statements as, "To progress at meditation there must be strict moral discipline", or "You cannot expect fast results but must work for years." Now, there is truth in both these statements. But in this context, they are really symptoms of extreme rigidity and dogmatism, which, in principle, is no different than the dogmatism of many Christian missionaries or other persons doggedly committed to a given institution. One's commitment to the tradition and to the letter of the teaching is so strong that one is incapable of truly practicing that very same teaching which advises one to have no prejudices and to see truth as universal and independent of any institution. I feel that this unfortunate phenomenon accounts for several instances of very diligent and dedicated meditation practitioners who, despite years of intensive practice, reveal little more than chronic, mild depression mixed with plodding determination.

The theme of guilt and self-punishment is one factor (though not the only one) which tends to perpetuate the phenomenon of diligent striving with minimal results. It usually begins with one taking a highly idealistic, moralistic, and sometimes devotional approach to *Dhamma*. One tries for one-pointed concentration and complete suppression of mental defilements. One fails and tries again; fails and tries again. Blaming oneself for one's failure, one comes to feel guilty and tries even harder, again failing. With this, the austerity of one's practice comes to take on a self-punitive nature. Angry with oneself, one becomes more severe with oneself.

For those who have some insight into their dilemma, there may be the added problem of feeling guilty about feeling guilty or becoming irritated that one gets irritated. But insight is also

the first step to resolution. The second step is to back off and relax a bit. As the *Buddha* said, the guitar string once too slack has now been wound too tight, and to produce harmony, the tension must be relieved. For idealistic, moralistic personalities, letting go and relaxing are the very things that intensify one's guilt. Yet in principle, this is much like what the *Buddha* did when he renounced austere asceticism and took up the middle way. The practitioner must stand back and re-appraise his whole involvement in Buddhism and examine the matter fully without fearing the consequences of his decision.

In evaluating progress at meditation, it is important to distinguish between true Buddhist attainment and adaptation. Any human being (or for that matter almost any biological organism) when placed in a new situation goes through the process of adjusting, adapting, and growing accustomed. This is true of human life in general, and it is true of a man who takes the robes of a Buddhist Monk. With the passage of time, he grows to accept his role, to acclimatize, and to learn to "work the system"; he may become contented and happy by virtue of duration and age alone.

This process of adaptation is especially relevant in the case of intensive meditation practice where one may spend weeks or months confined to a small room, leaving that room only for brief meetings and instructions from the meditation master. In such situations, the practitioner may get extreme feelings of peace and happiness, of clarity and alertness of mind such as never before seen, and also he or she may glimpse what appear to be transcendental states. (However, moments of depression, agitation, sobbing, etc. are also common, depending on the person.) Many who have completed such training have come away greatly impressed and highly praising this technique. However, it appears that all of these impressive subjective experiences vanish as soon as one comes out of cloistered isolation, and then, much like a drug experience, they remain only as memories. Moreover, many people who have "finished the course" appear to manifest the same selfishness and general human shortcomings as found in human beings picked at random. In addition, there is a hazard in that some "graduates" have revealed extreme pride relative to their attainment.

From this, it should not be assumed that there is nothing to be gained from such intensive training. On the contrary, I have frequently suggested it to persons seeking competent meditation instruction. However, I do feel that the empirical evidence shows that, for many, if not most people, this technique alone is insufficient. And the very facts of the Noble Eightfold Path and the Buddhist scriptures in general support this thesis. Thus, it would be wise to resolve one's mundane problems of social adjustment and other emotional conflicts before attempting more specialized practices.

Quite often, a cloister which protects one from all forms of insults, humiliation, irritation, and anxiety may induce a false sense of attainment and lull one into complacency. We can confront and abolish our mental defilements only when they are actively alive in our minds. We cannot do this when they are but hazy memories or intellectually created notions. Consequently, many practitioners have found that their progress is enhanced by having true life situations of social interaction and frustration. On the other hand, an excessive exposure to such interactions and frustrations may exceed one's ability for alert mindfulness, and one thereby insidiously becomes involved with the quarrels and fascinations that breed hatred and sorrow. When living in a cloister where no problems arise, one's defensive reactions and dispositions may lie dormant and thus remain hidden. But in ordinary lay life, temptations, sensations, and problems arise so fast that much of the daily routine is little more than a repeating pattern of perceive, react, and solve; perceive, react, and solve; perceive, react, and solve; and so on.

Thus, for many practitioners, the solution lies in a middle way between these extremes: that is, a situation in which one still has a moderate exposure to chores, annoyances, and social interactions, but this is interspersed with intervals of quietude and meditation. Such intervals may be for a period of hours or of weeks depending on individual needs and circumstances. Thus, by maintaining an optimal amount of involvement with social and sensory arousal, such a one does more than just perceive, react, and solve. With mindfulness, one is able to catch the perception and reaction as it arises. One observes it, scrutinizes it, and evaluates it. In so doing, it may then be modified, abandoned, or developed as seen fit. One acts with mindfulness instead of on habit or reflex, and, thus, new responses and solutions may be learned. If (as some psychologists have claimed) one's personality is the sum total of one's perceptions, responses, and reactions, then in this way, the growth and development of the personality is possible. The optimum proportion of time that one should spend in isolated meditation as contrasted with the time spent in more mundane pursuits will vary among different individuals. It will also vary according to the method of practice and with different times and stages of development for a given individual.

I state these above conclusions not only from a theoretical position and not just because they seem to be revealed in the life pattern of the *Buddha* and His disciples as portrayed in the *suttas*. My own limited observations of persons who appear to have progressed at Buddhist practice also fit this conclusion.

It is against such a background of observations and considerations that I have reviewed my own earlier writing on meditation. In essence, these words still appear to be sound, and there are no statements that I would see fit to repudiate. However, I feel one point needs to be more strongly emphasized, and that is that a regular daily practice of meditation alone will not be likely to show results unless one is willing to thoroughly scrutinize one's entire pattern of living and be prepared to revise or abandon this lifestyle if so indicated. In the same way, one who undertakes Buddhist training as either a Monk or lay practitioner would do well not to set a time limit and should not commit himself too strongly to future plans (such as "I will finish my university training" or "I will return to my homeland to teach the *Dhamma*"). For such a one has already decided beforehand just what he or she will become and, thereby, has limited the amount of change that he or she will allow himself or herself to make.

Also (and partly as a result of Buddhaghosa's writings, that is, the *Visuddhimagga*), I think I have emphasized too strongly the amount of breathing and other bodily-directed concentrations called for in beginning practice. I say this with some hesitation because it has become popular in some circles to completely disown concentration as important to Buddhist practice, and I do not agree with this view. But if one focuses exclusively on breathing, walking, or whatever to the point of blocking all thoughts and emotions, one is thereby turning one's attention away from the very mental defilements and neurotic conflicts that must be confronted in order to be overcome. Thus, it is probably significant that, in the Noble Eightfold Path, Right Concentration follows after Right Mindfulness.

One meets a fair number of people who have (or at least claim to have) made considerable attainment at one-pointed concentration. Yet, with a few notable exceptions, they appear to be just as prone to selfishness and petty jealousies as any ordinary persons whom one might meet at random. Some, in fact, have shown themselves to be very unhappy, lonely, and/or insecure. On the other hand, persons who have made only slight progress at sustained concentration have, nevertheless, in the course of Buddhist practice, made considerable progress at diminishing conceit, resentment, depression, and selfishness. (However, the one person in my

experience who, after months of close observation, appears to have made the greatest progress towards removing mental defilements of all sorts, is also the only person I know who appears capable of entering the third *jhāna* at will.)

The same is true of the labeling technique which is especially common in some forms of Burmese intensive training. With this technique, one, who in meditation, finds himself or herself daydreaming will simply note this and label it "imagining, imagining" or "fantasy, fantasy" and then return to awareness of breathing, body sensation, or whatever. However, daydreams and fantasies are most often an expression of our desires and emotional conflicts. If one examines the daydream in the frame of mind: "What does it express?", "What desire is it attempting to satisfy?", "What feeling does it carry?", then, one can gain insight into one's emotional needs and, at the same time, confront those same mental taints which meditation is supposed to overcome. The labeling technique is, of course, highly useful in dispensing with physical distractions such as itches, pains, and noises; and with certain types of moods (for example, boredom) and certain kinds of memories. But it must be used judiciously; for if used exclusively, it can retard progress.

A general rule of practice which many practitioners have used to advantage is as follows: One starts practice by attempting to quiet and concentrate the mind. But after some minutes of finding that the mind repeatedly wanders from its intended object, the practitioner then stands back as it were and asks: "Just what is my present state of mind at this instant?", "What is it that makes my attention wander from its intended object?" This, then, is analyzed and confronted. In principle, this is much like another useful technique which is: One does not choose any given meditation subject but instead simply sits and takes note: "What is my mental state now? What gross feelings? What subtle feelings? What memories and expectations? What intentions or desires?" In actual practice, this is done, not in the form of verbal thoughts as expressed in the preceding sentences, but rather as a state of watchful observation with few if any word thoughts present. Quite often at such times, one finds a subtle mental defilement which must be examined and discarded. That is the idea: "Now I am meditating and want to have something to show for it. I want something to happen." Or it may be: "I want to confront and overcome my anger, but now that I'm looking for it, it seems to have gone", and, with this, a feeling of frustration arises. Herein, one has set a goal and been thwarted. Thus, the desiring of this specific goal and its resultant frustration is the very state of mind that must be dealt with. Successful meditation requires catching the immediate present.

Finally, a note about the attainments in meditation: unless one is very advanced, one does not expect or aspire to any new or unusual experience other than those that are known in ordinary life. Instead, the attainments are negative ones and thus only seen in retrospect. For example, one suddenly reflects: "A year ago, I was chronically depressed, unhappy, irritable, defensive. That rarely happens now. Such and such a thing used to upset me greatly. Now, it happens and I hardly notice."

It may be stating the case too strongly to say that, in meditation, one seeks to gain nothing. For there is an increase in happiness and peace of mind. But when asked, "What have you gained from meditation?", the answer would be: "It is not what I have gained that is important but rather what I have diminished, namely, greed (*lobha*), hatred (*dosa*), and delusion (*moha*)." ■